

Continue in the Spirit

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, January 14, 2024
PASSAGES	Galatians 1; Galatians 2; Galatians 3; Galatians 4; Galatians 5; Galatians 6
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:12:13 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

There is no pay wall on the gospel. You were not started off by grace and then handed a bill for the upgrade — the same faith in Jesus that justified you is what supplies the Spirit, the miracles and your access to the Father, permanently. Every ladder we build to heaven is a return to slavery we were already carried out of.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Paul's language in Galatians is deliberately combative because the stakes are life and death. He calls the alternative gospel a curse, and the people promoting it false brothers.
- ◆ The question he keeps circling is one question: did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Everything else in the letter hangs on the answer.
- ◆ "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" is not rhetoric. It is the exact instinct most Christians have after a scummy week.
- ◆ If righteousness could be reached by doing things, God would have told us how. Christ died — therefore that road does not exist.
- ◆ The pull toward religious effort is usually pride wearing a spiritual costume. Being hardcore feels good because it is a way of being better than other people.
- ◆ Jesus Christ is your forty-day fast, your unbroken prayer life, your generosity. As high priest he is the reason a prayer is heard at all.

- ◆ Freedom is the point, not a side effect. “For freedom Christ has set us free” — and the Father is eager, not reluctant, to give you the kingdom.

► 1:12:13

Matt opened on a cold Austin Sunday with a question he said had bothered him since the day he got saved: did I get all my sins forgiven up until that day, and then what? He described the feeling exactly — you go to a website, read a few paragraphs, and hit the prompt asking for two dollars a month to read the rest. “So Jesus is like, all right, I’ll get you going, you’re forgiven till today.” Some kind of pay wall scheme the Lord is working on.

The questions people actually carry

► 1:12:46

He told about a family who asked him to talk to a relative going around telling everyone he had not sinned since his conversion. Matt’s first instinct was to ask the man’s wife — except the man was single and lived alone, so the whole account was self-reporting. And then the obvious question: what do we do with all the verses in the New Testament about confessing sins?

The opposite worry is more common. You have walked with Christ thirty or forty years and you feel scummy and crummy. Do you have to become a Christian again? Should you get re-baptized? Matt’s answer is no — you were baptized into Christ. But he took the anxiety seriously, because underneath it is the sense that the initial trial run did not work out and now you are climbing back.

Reading Galatians straight through

► 1:15:33

Rather than build an outline, Matt ran the drumbeat of the letter itself, and recommended reading the whole thing in one sitting — fifteen minutes silently, twenty-five out loud, about the length of one chapter of a Brandon Sanderson novel.

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

GALATIANS 1:6–8 ↗

Gospel simply means good news. So why the fighting words? Because there is no other salvation, and when the subject is life or death with people you love, you get combative. Paul planted this church; he had relational capital to spend, and he spent it. Some things he will not compromise on even slightly, even for the sake of the relationship.

Titus, Peter, and what “works of the law” meant

► 1:17:25

Titus was Greek and was not compelled to be circumcised, despite pressure — and Matt drew attention to the words Paul chose for the people applying it ([Galatians 2:3–5](#)): false brothers, who slipped in to spy out our freedom, so that they might bring us into slavery. Paul would not yield for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved.

Then Antioch, where Peter ate with the Gentiles until certain men arrived and he drew back. Barnabas was carried along with him. Matt noted how hard a confrontation with friends is, and that you save it for something that matters — Paul was not smoothing things over, he was stirring the pot on purpose ([Galatians 2:11–14](#)). What made it hypocrisy was asking of others exactly what they themselves had just been freed from.

“We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

GALATIANS 2:16 ↗

Keeping track of what “works of the law” has meant so far in the letter: circumcision, kosher eating habits, and generally living like a Jew. The common thread is a behavior focus — a zeroing in on what we are doing and not doing.

If there were a way to earn it, he would have told us

► 1:19:18

Matt walked through [Galatians 2:19–21](#) — crucified with Christ, no longer I who live — and stopped on the last line: if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. He set that against the logic of the sacrificial system, where [the life of the creature is in the blood](#). Drain the blood and the animal is dead; it gave its life. Jesus shed his blood and gave us his life. If justification, forgiveness,

grace and relationship with the Father were available by doing things, God would have given us the instructions. Jesus did die, and it was not for nothing — so there is no stairway.

The one question, asked five ways

► 1:21:03

“Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

GALATIANS 3:2-3 ↗

Matt admitted he does not have the guts to preach like that. But he pressed on the detail most readers skate past, in [Galatians 3:5](#): does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Not the initial goosebumps and the confession of sin — the whole ongoing supply. Did you think of Galatians as this Pentecostal a book?

He pushed further into [Galatians 3:10](#): everyone who relies on works of the law is under a curse, because the law demands all of it, not the parts we enjoy. “We don’t just dip our toe in the water when it feels good with some religious zealotry. It always feels good to be hardcore, because it’s a way of being better than other people — and that always feels great.”

The promise came first, and the law could not annul it

► 1:22:57

Paul’s human example: nobody annuls or amends a ratified covenant. The promise to Abraham and his offspring — singular, meaning Christ — was ratified 430 years before the law arrived, so the law cannot void it ([Galatians 3:15–18](#)). The law is not contrary to the promise; it was the guardian holding everything under sin until faith came, and now that faith has come we are sons of God through faith, baptized into Christ ([Galatians 3:21–27](#)).

Which makes the turn back so strange: “Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?” ([Galatians 4:9](#)). Matt was careful with the next line about observing days and months and seasons and years ([Galatians 4:10](#)) — Paul is not angry that you celebrate Christmas or throw parties. What is deadly is leaning on how proud we are that we do them.

The picture he kept returning to: you lay a foundation of Christ and Christ alone, and then from that point on you start keeping track of everything you do, because obviously that is what God likes — “Jesus got me to level zero, but really I’m going to build the edifice.” The false brothers in [Galatians 4:17](#) make much of you so that you will make much of them. Pride leads us into this.

Freedom, and a Father who is eager

► 1:23:58

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

GALATIANS 5:1 ↗

Here Matt named where the fear actually comes from: not knowing God’s character. We assume he was gracious enough to get us going but is now irritated that we are still weak and vulnerable. Against that he set [Luke 12:32](#) — “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” He wants us free. He wants to be our God and to dwell in our midst.

And then the warning in [Galatians 5:2–4](#): accept circumcision and you are obligated to keep the whole law. Rely on part of it and you must rely on all of it. That applies to a great deal more than circumcision.

The X-Men problem

► 1:27:09

This is where the message got specific and funny and uncomfortable. Matt described the ministries built like pyramid schemes — the starter-pack Jesus thing is fine, but if you want to go next level, do I have a commemorative coin for you and a prayer cloth. A book on a good morning routine, another on a good evening routine, and if you do both there is probably more Spirit in your life.

He recounted a famous preacher’s teaching on prayer as a walk through the tabernacle: pray a little and you are in the outer courts, stay focused half an hour and you are on the front steps, quit thinking about your shopping list and you are finally in the sanctuary — and if you get distracted you start all the way back outside. The room was hanging on it. Matt’s point was that the appetite is universal, not the preacher’s alone. How spiritual do you feel after reading your Bible every morning for a week? After a real fast, not the candy kind? After leading someone to Christ — “you’re basically one of the X-Men. There’s the regular Christians, but then there’s the elite X-Men. They meet in private.”

“Honey, why don’t you do the dishes? Because I’m worried about the anointing slipping off.”

He named the mirage plainly: the me-five-years-from-now who is levitating and glowing, always one miracle away.

Jesus Christ is your prayer life

► 1:29:48

“Jesus Christ is your forty-day fast. Jesus Christ is your perfect unbroken prayer life,” Matt said. “Jesus Christ is our VIP access to the Father, period.” Trusting in his sacrifice is what it means to continue on in the Spirit rather than be perfected by the flesh.

He made it concrete with what he does when he lays hands on the sick. He does not audit his prayer life or count the minutes, does not tally the chapters read that week or check whether the tithe landed on exactly ten percent. He remembers that Jesus’ prayer life is very good, and that as high priest in heaven it is an unbroken chain. That is why praying in his name means something more than a signal that we are finished talking — we pray from a place of favor with the Father because of Jesus, and we never advance past that.

The counterfeit is available in bulk, he warned — hundreds of hours of it online, and it feels great in the moment. “But it’ll leave you hung over and wasted. You’ll feel like, again, I’m back at ground level. Yeah, because you didn’t go anywhere, buddy.” The good news is that at ground level zero you were already at the finish line in Christ Jesus.

Paul’s own summary closes it: neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but a new creation, and the only boast left is the cross (Galatians 6:12–15).

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

GALATIANS 6:14 ↗

Paul could have boasted about apostleship, ancestry, fruitful ministry, fame. “You’re probably not going to get a rap sheet as impressive as Paul, and his only boast is in Jesus. Let’s take a hint.”

Praying for it, for free

► 1:34:35

At a sister's suggestion during worship, Matt had the church stand and pray — for healing, for heart ministry, for the dropping of the dead weight of religious nonsense, and to cut down every ladder to heaven. He asked God to supply the Spirit, work miracles, justify and forgive, and he insisted the congregation stand on the blood of Jesus while asking. Forgiveness, the warmth of relationship, physical healing, prophetic encouragement — “all of it at no cost to you, because of the grace of Jesus Christ. Not because you were such a good boy this week.” Earlier in the service Mandy had made the same point from [Acts 4:12](#): there is salvation in no one else. Heart Ministry teams were available afterward.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Galatians 1:6–8](#)
- [Galatians 2:3–5](#)
- [Galatians 2:11–14](#)
- [Galatians 2:16](#)
- [Galatians 2:19–21](#)
- [Leviticus 17:11](#)
- [Galatians 3:2–3](#)
- [Galatians 3:5](#)
- [Galatians 3:10](#)
- [Galatians 3:15–18](#)
- [Galatians 3:21–27](#)
- [Galatians 4:9](#)
- [Galatians 4:10](#)
- [Galatians 4:17](#)
- [Galatians 5:1](#)
- [Luke 12:32](#)
- [Galatians 5:2–4](#)
- [Galatians 6:12–15](#)
- [Galatians 6:14](#)
- [Acts 4:12](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where did you first pick up the idea that the gospel has a pay wall — that grace gets you in and effort keeps you there?
2. Matt said being hardcore feels good because it is a way of being better than other people. Where does that show up in you, and what does it cost the people around you?
3. What is your version of the tabernacle prayer routine — the practice you quietly believe makes God more likely to hear you?
4. “Jesus Christ is your prayer life.” What would change about how you approach God if you actually believed that this week?
5. Name one ladder to heaven you are going to cut down before next Sunday, and tell the group what you will 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=e2ht_OUL84A&t=4333s

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.