

God's Unchangeable Purpose

SPEAKER Matt Ryniker

DATE Sunday, March 10, 2024

PASSAGES Hebrews 5; Hebrews 6; Isaiah 5; Matthew 18; Galatians 6

MESSAGE Begins at 1:15:14 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Hebrews 6 is the passage people are most afraid of, and the fear rests on a misreading. The impossibility Hebrews names is not that God has stopped being willing — it is that no preacher, friend or pastor can repent on another person's behalf. God's purpose to be your God, sworn by an oath, does not have an expiration date.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ "I think I've turned away and I can't come back" is one of the most common fears people bring to a pastor. Matt has heard it in emails from strangers and from a student in a school hallway.
- ◆ The ESV renders **Hebrews 6:6** in the active voice — it is impossible *to restore them*. The impossibility sits in the helper, not in the God who forgives.
- ◆ A universal claim needs only one counter-example to fall. The prodigal son, David, and Peter are three.
- ◆ **Hebrews 6:7–8** is riffing on Isaiah's vineyard song, and both ask the same question: what more was there to do for this field that has not already been done?
- ◆ Jesus told Peter to forgive seventy-seven times. He does not hold his people to a standard he refuses to keep himself.
- ◆ The whole passage is written as encouragement. Read as "one lapse and you are finished," it would be the most discouraging encouragement ever written.

- ◆ The first thing to repent of is thinking so poorly of God that you imagine his conviction wavers.
- ◆ Wanting to repent is itself evidence of life. Dead men do not want that.

► 1:15:14

Matt opened with a proposal for daylight savings reform — a hundred and twenty nights of the year adjusted by one minute forward and one minute back until the nation reaches what he called “time enlightenment” — a note on the congregational meeting on March 20, and a promise, prompted by texts he got the previous Sunday, that the prom fundraiser story ended fine. Then he got to the text he had been looking forward to.

The question people are actually asking

► 1:18:31

He had recently asked a small group, mostly high schoolers, how many of them had read Hebrews. Almost none had. What most of them had was a vague impression: there is a scary passage in there somewhere that says if you turn away from God you cannot come back. The week after he started this series, an email arrived from someone he had never met asking that exact question. Years earlier, when he taught algebra, a student stopped him in a hallway — not for math help — and asked whether he had sinned too much to come back.

This is why Matt reads hard passages out loud rather than around them. If you ask people to read the Bible, they will hit the hard parts, and they deserve company when they do.

Milk, solid food, and then the warning

► 1:21:02

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child, but solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

HEBREWS 5:12-14 ↗

Two groups, described three ways: milk and solid food, immature and mature, unskilled and trained. Then Hebrews 6:1–3 presses the same contrast forward — leave the elementary doctrine, go on to maturity, stop laying the foundation again — and runs straight into the sentence everyone is afraid of.

► 1:22:28

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”

HEBREWS 6:4–6 ↗

Jesus cannot literally be crucified again; he has been raised and is seated in heaven. So what does “crucifying once again” mean? Matt’s answer: those who knew him and discard him are joining the ranks of the people who saw him, knew him, and judged him worthless.

The vineyard behind the verse

► 1:23:37

Verses 7 and 8 turn to farming: land that drinks the rain and produces a crop receives a blessing, while land that bears thorns and thistles is worthless and near to being cursed. Many readers hear Isaiah underneath it — a love song about a vineyard that turns bitter, the way a country song does.

“My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes... What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?”

ISAIAH 5:1–4 ↗

Every detail lines up: the ground prepared, the planting, the anticipation, the sour yield. And the speaker changes partway through — the story is suddenly being told by the Lord, and the question is put to the men of Judah as judges of his case. Isaiah names the vineyard outright in verse 7: it is the house of Israel. God created a people out of a couple who could not have children, rescued them from slavery, fed them daily, sent deliverers, sent prophets. What more was there to do?

Where the impossibility lies

► 1:28:40

Here the message turns on grammar. The NIV reads “it is impossible... to be brought back to repentance” — passive, a category of thing that cannot happen. The ESV reads “to restore them again to repentance” — active, with an implied someone doing the restoring. “Imagine you’re alone in the woods and you see a bear,” Matt said. “Active voice versus passive voice is the difference between eating or being eaten.”

Take the passive reading first, as a universal claim: nobody who has known Jesus and fallen away can repent. A universal claim is the easiest kind to break. If I say all butterflies are blue, you need exactly one butterfly.

► 1:31:00

The prodigal son grew up in his father’s house, left, came back for unimpressive reasons — he was hungry — and could not finish his apology because his father was already restoring him (Luke 15:20–24). David knew the Lord, knew that Bathsheba and the killing of Uriah were wrong, and said plainly that he had sinned against the Lord (Psalm 51:4). And if the objection is that those men had not walked with Christ himself — Peter had. He did not merely sin; he denied his knowledge of Jesus with an oath, three times (Matthew 26:69–75). He repented.

► 1:33:39

So read it in the active voice, and picture the conversation. Have you heard about the goodness of the Lord? Yes. Met Jesus? Yes. Prayed? Yes. Tasted the gifts of the Spirit, been touched with healing? Yes — and I still don’t want it. Where is the impossibility now? It is in the person trying to help. Matt’s foil was a Scientology recruiter who can always invent a level five, a discount, a private party at Tom Cruise’s house, a secret handshake. “That’s not true of the gospel. There’s no secret gospel in the back.” If someone knows everything there is to know about the Lord and does not want him, all a preacher can do is lay the foundation again — which is exactly the milk the author has just told them to stop drinking.

“I could talk to you about repentance, but I can’t give you that status of a repentant person.”

Would Jesus fail his own standard?

► 1:36:06

The deeper problem, Matt said, is not a misread verse but a misunderstanding of who God is. So he went to Peter's question about limits.

“Then Peter came up and said to him, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

MATTHEW 18:21-22 ↗

Not a countdown to the seventy-eighth offense — an abundance. And imagine standing before the Lord as he asks whether you forgave far past seven times, then telling him you fell away and were not allowed back. He read [Galatians 6:1-2](#) the same way, with an invented parenthesis to expose the absurdity: restore him gently — “and I really only mean first-time offenders, because after that we’re all toast.” Does Jesus live by his own laws?

The oath God swore

► 1:40:15

The very next verse settles the tone: “Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things — things that belong to salvation” ([Hebrews 6:9](#)). This was written as encouragement. If it meant one lapse and you are finished, it would be the most discouraging encouragement on the planet.

That is what Matt told the student in the hallway. You want to repent? Yes. You want the Lord? Yes. Dead men don't want that. You're not dead.

► 1:42:12

Then the passage moves to Abraham, and to the strongest guarantee available in the ancient world. People swear by something greater than themselves and the oath ends the dispute; God, having no one greater, swore by himself ([Hebrews 6:13-15](#)).

“So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.”

HEBREWS 6:17-19 ↗

Matt tested the anchor by rewriting it the way fear hears it: *God may still love you, unless he doesn't, but he probably does; if you want to repent that's good, I hope he lets you.* Nobody hangs their weight on that. What the text actually offers is different — the judge and your defense attorney are, in his phrase, resolutely in cahoots in your favor, and the purpose that will not change is that he would be your God and you would know him.

What to repent of first

► 1:46:42

So when you sin, and especially when you sin spectacularly, the last thing to worry about is whether you can talk to Jesus about it. He is the first one to go to. We can repent of our deeds of darkness, our addictions and our fears — but the thing to put on the chopping block first is the belief that God's love has a shelf life, that it lasted a while and then he moved on to some other supernova.

His resolve is not merely to save people from their sins but to bring them in by the spirit of adoption as children who know him. “He will let you repent,” Matt closed, “but that choice remains inside of you.” Today is the day.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Hebrews 5:12–14](#)
- [Hebrews 6:1–3](#)
- [Hebrews 6:4–6](#)
- [Isaiah 5:1–4](#)
- [Isaiah 5:7](#)
- [Luke 15:20–24](#)
- [Psalm 51:4](#)
- [Matthew 26:69–75](#)
- [Matthew 18:21–22](#)
- [Galatians 6:1–2](#)
- [Hebrews 6:9](#)
- [Hebrews 6:13–15](#)
- [Hebrews 6:17–19](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Have you ever quietly wondered whether you had gone too far to come back? What put that fear there?
2. Matt says the impossibility in Hebrews 6 sits in the helper, not in God. How does that change the way you read the passage?
3. Isaiah asks, “What more was there to do for my vineyard?” What has God already done for you that you tend to overlook when you are afraid of him?
4. Where do you hold yourself to a standard of forgiveness that you assume God will not keep toward you?
5. If the first thing to repent of is thinking poorly of God, what would repenting of that look like for you 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=N22GZ8SErn8&t=4514s>

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.