

Commitment

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 1, 2024
PASSAGES	Acts 19; Luke 18; Luke 14; Philippians 1; 1 Corinthians 1; John 4
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:57:46 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus asks for commitment that goes all the way to a cross — not our best, all of it. And then the same texts turn around on us: the God who prizes persistence, who tells us to count the cost before we start, has never once started something he was unwilling to finish. The Incarnation is what that looks like.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The Ephesian believers did not sell their magic books or turn them in for safekeeping. They burned them in public — millions of dollars of hand-copied scrolls — which is plan A with no plan B.
- ◆ Faith, in the parable of the persistent widow, looks like a commitment to prayer so constant you start to wonder whether you are being a bother. Jesus is pleased by that.
- ◆ “Hate” your father and mother is an idiom, and verse 27 explains it: commitment to Christ ranks above every other commitment. The proof is a cross you carry.
- ◆ Jesus is not icing on an otherwise complete life. The minimum expectation is death, because what he is offering is his resurrection life.
- ◆ Turn the texts around and ask what they say about God. If he prizes persistence, is he flighty? If he tells us to count the cost, does he start what he cannot finish?
- ◆ Jesus is not depleted by pursuing us. “My food is to do the will of him who sent me” — he is nourished by the mission, not worn down by it.
- ◆ The Incarnation is permanent. God the Son is still man, and always will be. That is how committed he is.

► 0:57:46

Matt opened with a photograph he admitted he had no business taking. Hope has built a friendship with an orthodox synagogue in town, and when their rabbi came here to preach from Genesis, Matt went back with a large delegation to Rabbi Dan’s congregation. Standing in the man’s pulpit, he quietly photographed the inside of it — stacks of papers, exactly like his own. “I asked him how often do you clean this out.”

Where the Gospel of John series has been

► 0:59:30

Hope is midway through a series on John, and Matt paused it for the first Sunday of Advent. He recapped the questions he has been leaving with the congregation, each of them a standing offer to trade answers with him. From Nicodemus, who moved from confusion to wrestling to carrying Jesus’ body for burial: in what darkness could you turn and walk in the light. From the Samaritan woman, whom Jesus honored with a long conversation and also pinpointed exactly where she was struggling:

where would Jesus poke you — not aggression, but an invitation into deeper relationship. And from the message on glory: where could you walk in honor by obeying even when it costs you something.

Commitment is the Advent version of that same question, “because we see God’s commitment to us in Christ’s Incarnation.”

1. The scroll burning at Ephesus

► 1:02:18

Acts 19 has the sons of a Jewish high priest trying to invoke the name of Jesus without belonging to him, and being overpowered for it. Jesus’ reputation is rising in Ephesus, and part of that reputation is that his name carries weight and cannot be used as a tool.

“And many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

ACTS 19:18–19 ↗

► 1:04:50

Matt walked the escalation one step at a time. They were already believers. They came physically forward and identified themselves with the movement. Their confession was public, not private. They named the shameful things by name. And then they went further and destroyed the books. These were not paperbacks from a half-price shop in Ephesus — hand-copied manuscripts, perhaps five of a kind in the whole city, expensive precisely because they had cost years to collect. There was no buyback program and nothing set aside to be quietly retrieved later. Matt Googled the sum: millions of dollars, set on fire.

“This shows commitment. A decisive turn towards Jesus with no intention of reverting. This is their plan A, and there is no plan B.”

2. The widow who would not stop coming

► 1:06:18

“In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ ... ‘Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”

LUKE 18:2-5 ↗

Matt enjoyed the judge as comedy — “who would actually say this about themselves?” — and then made the man’s motive precise. He is not annoyed the way you are annoyed when someone pricks your conscience about a debt you owe. His conscience is not involved. He just wants her gone.

► 1:09:36

Then the pivot:

“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? ... Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes

That closing question is not a change of subject. Luke told us the point before the parable started — that they ought always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). So the faith the Son of Man is looking for is the widow’s: prayer that keeps involving and invoking the Father in everything, past the point where you start to wonder whether it is too much.

3. Count the cost — Jesus is not a garnish

► 1:11:45

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

LUKE 14:26-27 ↗

The shock is an idiom, and it cannot mean disdain for your family — the same Lord teaches us to love our neighbor and honor father and mother. Verse 27 supplies the meaning: our commitment to Christ stands above every other commitment, and we follow him bearing a cross. Matt pressed on the image. What do you do on a cross? This is not a tea party. You die on it.

“Jesus Christ is not a garnish besides our basically complete lives. He wants all of it. He wants all of you.”

► 1:15:30

The two parables that follow are the application. The man planning a tower sits down first and counts whether he can finish, because a half-built tower invites mockery. The king with ten thousand deliberates before meeting twenty thousand, and if the numbers are bad he sends for terms of peace while the enemy is still far off (Luke 14:28–32). Then the conclusion:

“any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Why start a tower you cannot finish? Why go to war you will probably lose? “So why be kind of a disciple of Jesus?”

Matt did not exempt himself. “These words prick against me, but of course that doesn’t make them not true.” The sharpness is not meant to poke at us and stop there; it is meant to go through.

4. Now turn the texts around and look at God

► 1:19:56

This was the hinge of the message, and the reason it belongs to Advent. Everything the texts say about what God expects is also a disclosure of what God is like. From his perspective, persistence is prized. From his perspective, you do not start what you cannot finish. So does he ask us to be something he is not willing to be himself? Do we imagine he is asking us, in any category of life, to be better than he is?

► 1:21:20

Which makes these texts, as Matt put it, very Christmassy. The Incarnation was not a trial run. It was not “I’ll embrace humanity and see how it goes, and if it turns out to be too difficult there’s always the angels.” God the Son became man and to this day in the Trinity is man. He will never undo it. That is how committed he is.

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:6 ↗; READ FROM PHILIPPIANS 1:3–6 ↗

Why be confident that the worldwide body of Christ will be saved, cleaned and made glorious — or that God intends to keep blessing Hope Chapel? Matt offered the deliberately dumb multiple choice: because we have evolved to a higher level of religious skill and earned it? No. Because that is who he is.

5. He is not shocked by your weakness

► 1:25:48

Try to picture God blindsided by your failure — panicking, saying he has never seen this before. Did he not see the end from the beginning when he pursued you?

“...so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:7-9 ↗

Matt guessed out loud that in a room this size, some are discouraged — remembering a golden age of journaling and morning Bible reading and visible fruit, and feeling now like they have let God down too many times to be wanted. Back burner, if he ever gets around to it. But if God values persistence enough to hold up an annoying widow as the model, why would we assume he is not persistent with us? Imagine Jesus saying the church is harder than he thought and he is tired.

6. “My food is to do the will of him who sent me”

▶ 1:29:08

Back to John, and the scene from the message two weeks earlier. The disciples urge him to eat.

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”

JOHN 4:34 ↗; THE SCENE BEGINS AT JOHN 4:31-34 ↗

Matt admitted he was taking a liberty with the phrasing, then took it: Jesus is nourished by accomplishing his Father’s mission. He lives for this. The alternative we quietly assume is that he is persistent out of obligation — he already bought us, so he takes the trash out again, the way we handle chores we have no regard for. But Jesus is better than we are. We are not going to deplete him, so that by the time this generation comes around he is out of patience.

▶ 1:31:42

“God actually wants to be generous to you.” Our generosity is often followed by regret, and when someone annoys us we stop returning the call. His is not like that. To the person who feels like damaged goods and wonders whether he wants them back — he lives for this.

7. So why commit, knowing we will fail

► 1:33:06

We start things and abandon them constantly — books, chores, friendships, more books. He does not. He went out of his way to tell us to count the cost first so that we would not quit halfway, and he is not about to do to us what he warned us against: get partway through a life and decide it was harder than he expected. He could have come to earth to visit, point out all the dumb things we are doing, explain how to live better, and leave. Instead he came to invite us to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and he would very much like us to be there.

The invitation is not to be somewhat committed. It goes all the way to his death, and it is answered by a commitment that goes all the way to ours. Matt closed by praying that the Holy Spirit would enable the church to find satisfaction and joy in God, and to follow, know, love, and walk in his ways.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- John 3
- John 4:1–26
- Acts 19:18–19
- Luke 18:1
- Luke 18:2–5
- Luke 18:7–8
- Luke 14:26–27
- Luke 14:28–32
- Luke 14:33
- Philippians 1:3–6
- Philippians 1:6
- 1 Corinthians 1:7–9
- John 4:31–34
- John 4:34
- Revelation 19:9

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. The Ephesians burned what they could have quietly kept. What is the thing you have not destroyed, only stored somewhere retrievable?
2. Matt said Jesus is pleased by prayer persistent enough to feel like a bother. What have you stopped asking for, and why did you stop?
3. Luke 14 asks you to count the cost before building. Where in your life are you standing next to a half-built tower?
4. Turn the texts around: which is harder for you to believe — that God prizes persistence, or that he is persistent with you?
5. If God is not shocked by your weakness and has not moved you to a back burner, what would you start again this week that you gave up on?

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=Sh45eUR1fs4&t=3466s>

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.