

Humility

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 8, 2024
PASSAGES	Romans 12; Philippians 2; Isaiah 45; Hebrews 2; Hebrews 4; Matthew 11
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:04:06 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God does not ask us to do anything he was unwilling to do himself. Christmas is the proof: the Son, fully God, refused to exploit the one advantage he genuinely had, and took on being human from the womb up. Our humility is obedience, but it is mostly imitation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Every time the Spirit prompts you to repent or obey, you are the chief beneficiary. Letting go of a bondage is not a bill God is collecting; it is a gift you are receiving.
- ◆ Paul pairs “do not be haughty” with “associate with the lowly.” The second is how you do the first — it is not an attitude you hold, it is a room you walk into.
- ◆ The people most in need of humbling are the least likely to think the sermon is for them. That is not a jab; it is how self-assessment works in every other field too.
- ◆ “A thing to be grasped” is an idiom for an advantage you really have and could use. Jesus was not disclaiming deity — he was declining to cash it in.
- ◆ “Emptied himself” carries no mystery. Paul says how: by taking the form of a servant, and by obeying to the point of death on a cross.
- ◆ Jesus was fully human and without sin, which settles something. Your creatureliness — needing sleep, food, help — is not the problem. Sin is the problem.
- ◆ It takes humility to become a Christian at all: to admit you are dead in your sins and come. And the one you come to is gentle and lowly.

► 1:04:06

Matt opened on the second Sunday of Advent with the church Christmas party, a neighbor's unexpected tin of cookies, and the observation that Christmas is, globally, a month-long party where we celebrate someone's birthday by giving gifts to each other. "It's a grandpa vibe," he said — the kind of thing a generous person does. Then he said it was relevant to the sermon, and it turned out to be.

The challenge, still standing

► 1:07:14

For five or six weeks Matt has been asking the same thing of the congregation, since the messages on Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman: ask the Lord where he would have you walk in obedience, and make it a real, tangible goal rather than an impossible one. He acknowledged the risk of annoying people by repeating it, and judged the risk worth taking.

The reason he keeps pressing is that we tend to hear obedience as a cost. "Let's say you drink too much and the Lord helps you let go of that — you win." Unforgiveness, likewise. On the human plane you are the chief beneficiary every time.

► 1:09:56

For fuel he read what he called a pre-sermon sermon, from a chapter that is personally special to him:

"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them."

ROMANS 12:4-8 ↗

Maybe the prompting is to stir up a gift that has gone dormant, or to serve more zealously, or to take up something new. He read on through [Romans 12:9-13](#) and stopped twice. First: "let love be genuine, abhor what is evil." A genuinely loving person hates things — the notion that love has no capacity for revulsion is simply not in the text. Second: "outdo one another in showing honor." You are permitted to be competitive here. Be creative with it.

Do not be haughty — associate with the lowly

► 1:14:51

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.”

ROMANS 12:14–16 ↗

Matt admitted he had to look up *haughty* — it means exalted, lofty, high in an arrogant way — and noticed that Paul pairs it with a command, not a mood. The way you stop being haughty is that you go and associate with the lowly. Lowly by class, wealth, beauty, education, age; whatever the things are that people prize and you do not see in the person in front of you. Disdain can run in either direction — you can look down on the rich, the pretty, the ivory tower — but Paul’s plain intention is the poor and the powerless.

► 1:15:26

Self-exaltation, he said, is ugly to God. It is natural to us, especially when we are insecure, and that does not make it less abhorrent. God gives grace to the humble but opposes the proud — and as spiritual warfare goes, there is no opponent stronger than the Lord himself. But God does not ask us for anything he is unwilling to do. Which is where Advent comes in.

A word for Joseph

► 1:16:36

Before the manger, a detour Matt said he had never taken in an Advent sermon: the humility required of Joseph. First the refusal — this is too weird. Then angelic help, and reluctant consent. Then the daily strangeness of it. “If this is God’s son, do I spank him?” The friends asking, twenty years on, whether he is still sure. The seasons when you cannot pay the bills and the wise men’s gold is long gone. To take on the responsibility for a son who is not yours, in a situation that could only wound your pride.

Philippians 2 — the mind that is yours in Christ

► 1:18:05

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–4 ↗

Selfish ambition is instinctive, Matt said, and we look after our own interests with a vigilance that is genuinely meticulous. Imagine spending that much care on the people around you.

► 1:20:55

He offered a reason to take the invitation personally even if you feel exempt from it. The Dunning-Kruger effect: he had been watching a karate instructor on YouTube stop men in Central Park and ask how they would do in a fight, and the ones with no training at all were the most confident. Matt's own years of martial arts have mostly taught him that he is weaker than he assumed, his reflexes are bad, and he drops his hands — one instructor took to carrying a pool noodle to slap him in the head. If that is how self-assessment works generally, then the people who most need to humble themselves before God are exactly the ones most likely to decide this topic does not apply to them.

► 1:21:43

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 ↗

Two things Matt wanted the room to hold precisely. First, the parallel: the same word carries “form of God” and “form of a servant.” As fully as he took on humanity, he is God — this is not a Trinity where the least divine member gets sent on the errands. Second, “a thing to be grasped” is a Greek idiom for an advantage you genuinely possess and could exploit. Paul is not saying Jesus modestly declined to claim deity. He is saying Jesus, knowing exactly who he was, would not use it for himself.

And “emptied himself” holds no mystery, because Paul finishes the sentence. He emptied himself by becoming a servant and obeying to the point of a cross. He did not stop being God. He started in utero — he could have arrived as a baby and did not; he could have appeared full-grown and did not. Nursed, washed, carried, dependent on a teenage girl in the ancient Near East with, as Matt put it, the medical technology of camping.

► 1:24:38

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11 ↗

Insane reward for insane humility — and Paul offers it as a pattern the Philippians are meant to fit into. The letter is full of the same shape: Paul, who could have made a legal case to get out of prison and did not; Timothy, not obliged to serve Paul as a son serves a father and doing it anyway; Epaphroditus, who could have excused himself from the risk. In each case a real right, voluntarily not exploited.

Whose knee, exactly

► 1:27:49

Matt sent the room back a few centuries for the source of that line:

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’”

ISAIAH 45:22–23 ↗

There is one God, and to him every knee will bow. Paul, urging a church toward humility, quotes it and says: that is about Jesus. The one with every power and right and privilege you could imagine is born a baby among us. A literal baby.

Made like his brothers in every respect

► 1:29:16

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death... Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.”

HEBREWS 2:14–17 ↗

“In every respect” is not merely a body, Matt said, because you are not merely a body. A human mind, a human will, the human capacity to suffer and be tempted.

► 1:30:33

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

HEBREWS 4:15–16 ↗

Being human is not the problem

► 1:31:15

If he was a hundred percent human and had no sin, then being human is not in itself sinful. Matt named an instinct he thinks many of us carry — that our creatureliness is embarrassing, that needing to eat and sleep and nap and be helped is somehow shameful. There is nothing wrong with being a person, and God is not disgusted with you for it.

Sin is the difference, and he would not soften it: our acts, words and thoughts that rebel against God’s will, or the negligence by which we avoid it. It twists the dignity of being made in God’s image. We have all been pierced by it and we have all picked it up to strike others with. It is corrosive, we cannot manage it ourselves, and its just wage is death —
“but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The invitation worth exploiting

► 1:36:11

Humility runs underneath most of what we call growth. Repentance requires it, because repentance is admitting you were wrong. Maturity requires it, because deciding to grow up is a way of saying you are not grown yet. Associating with the lowly requires it — and Matt pointed out that when Jesus associated with the lowly, the lowly were us. Picture an office that is a throne room ringed by majestic creatures of unknown power, and then deciding to take up residence on earth among these small people. Done in admiration, imitating him, our own humility becomes a form of worship.

It also takes humility to come to him at all — to admit you are sick and dying in your sin and to submit to a savior. Matt ended on how that arrival is received:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

MATTHEW 11:28-30 ↗

“Speaking of advantages that we can exploit,” Matt said, “let’s exploit this invitation.” His closing prayer asked for one thing: that each person would find the place where they can drop their death and get life instead.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Romans 12:4–8
- Romans 12:9–13
- Romans 12:14–16
- James 4:6
- Philippians 2:1–4
- Philippians 2:5–8
- Philippians 2:9–11
- Isaiah 45:22–23
- Hebrews 2:14–17
- Hebrews 4:15–16
- Romans 6:23
- Matthew 11:28–30

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt has been asking the same question for six weeks: where is the Lord prompting you toward obedience? What has come up when you have actually sat with it — and what has come up empty?
2. Paul says obedience is a gift you receive rather than a bill you pay. Where does that ring true from experience, and where does it still feel like loss?
3. “Associate with the lowly” is a command, not an attitude. Who counts as lowly in the world you actually move through — and when did you last spend time there?
4. Jesus had a real advantage and would not use it. Name an advantage you hold — position, money, seniority, being right — that you could decline to exploit.
5. If Matt’s point about self-assessment is fair, you are not the best judge of your own humility. Who could you ask this week, and what would you do with the answer?

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=pAN-TvFe1ME&t=3846s>

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.