

The Crucifixion

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, March 2, 2025
PASSAGES	John 19; 1 Corinthians 15; Romans 6
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:17:03 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus did not come merely to model a better way to live. He came to die, because nothing less would do — and the gospel Paul handed on is a list of things that *happened*, not a mood or a method. Hold on to that core and the changed life comes with it. Trade it for the changed life alone and you end up with neither.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Every detail of the crucifixion that looks like an accident — the trilingual placard, the seamless tunic, the two criminals — was written down centuries earlier. This was premeditated, not an untimely end.
- ◆ If Jesus came only to show us a better way, the result is not freedom but a conscience pricked a million times worse. Every culture already has a standard it cannot keep.
- ◆ The standard was never “better than average.” It is the glory of God.
- ◆ The gospel of 1 Corinthians 15 is entirely events: Christ died, was buried, was raised, appeared. “It’s not a vibe.”
- ◆ “Do better” is the rally cry of dead religion. It has nothing to say to a person who is genuinely failing.
- ◆ Christian humanism cannot counsel the brokenhearted and cannot see what God is already doing in someone who is still a mess.
- ◆ Obedience to Jesus is freedom. If you are mostly pursuing the flesh and keeping a little Jesus on the side, he will be a permanent problem in your life.

- ◆ Your chains were broken while you were still a sinner. Salvation is not a boss level you unlock after enough effort.

► 1:17:03

This was a communion Sunday, and the worship had already been circling one word — *behold him*. Matt picked up the Gospel according to John near its end, read through the crucifixion, and then said he was going to say “a whole host of very basic things.” The basic things turned out to be the load-bearing ones.

1. The crowd, the governor, and the sign nobody would take down

► 1:18:51

“They cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’”

JOHN 19:15-17 ↗

In Greek the chant rhymes — short, punchy, easy to imagine echoing off stone. “We have no king but Caesar” fits the charge that Jesus was an insurrectionist and fits nothing else, least of all their demand for Barabbas, least of all at Passover, the feast where the nation celebrates God delivering them from an oppressive power. Pilate was in Jerusalem precisely because that week made him nervous. The Zealots needed no organization or name tags; they were banded together by hatred of the occupation. For all Pilate knew, Jesus was a catalyst. So was Barabbas.

Matt was careful not to let this become a story about a governor and a mob teaming up. Pilate had marched Rome’s standards into the city and threatened instant death to the delegation that complained; Luke records him mingling the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices. This was contentious between all parties. Envy on one side, contempt on the other.

► 1:20:59

Then the inscription: *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*, in Aramaic, Latin and Greek, posted where the whole city walked past. The chief priests wanted it reworded. “What I have written I have written.” Matt admitted he has no idea what was in Pilate’s mind — annoyance, superstition, his wife’s dream, indifference. What he does know is who was orchestrating it. Jesus had been threatened with stoning and with a cliff, and the Father kept delivering him because it was not yet his hour. When the hour came, he laid his life down. Clearly labeled, in three languages.

► 1:22:00

He crucified between two evildoers because [Isaiah 53:9](#) said his grave would be with the wicked though he had done no violence. The soldiers split four ways what they could tear and gambled for what they could not:

“So they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.’ This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, ‘They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.’”

JOHN 19:23–24 ↗

That line is [Psalm 22:16–18](#), where David is encircled by dogs and a company of evildoers, counting his own bones while they stare and gloat. “This wasn’t just foretold,” Matt said. “This was premeditated. This was planned ahead of time. Jesus isn’t meeting an untimely end. This was his whole design.”

2. A family made by his word, from the cross

► 1:25:25

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”

JOHN 19:26–27 ↗

“Woman” is not the slight it sounds like in modern American English — no disrespect linguistically or culturally. The remarkable thing is that a man suffocating on a stake is arranging care for someone else. Pain normally shrinks the world to the size of the person in it. Here it does the opposite, and Matt read that as the strength of God on display.

And the word did not stop working when the hour ended. The family of God is established by Jesus speaking it into being — his own answer to [who is my mother and my brothers](#) was whoever does the will of God, and the will of God is that you believe in his Son. Look around the room: you were handed to one another.

► 1:27:13

“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

JOHN 19:28-30 ↗

3. So why did he have to die?

► 1:27:58

Here the message turned, and the rest of it hung on a rhetorical question: even a casual observer knows this story is a big deal — but *why*? What does a death have to do with Christianity?

Matt named the two answers he ran into as a teenager researching apologetics. First, the utility argument he associated with William James: Christians make good citizens, so you may as well be one. Second, and far more common, Jesus as the great example. People take “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” and twist it until Christianity *is* loving people — a better way to live, with Jesus as the demonstration. The conclusion writes itself: a good Christian is a good person, and a good person is an honorary Christian.

► 1:30:32

His objection was not that it is too demanding but that it is redundant and cruel. God has already given precepts, laws and prophets; he has given every person a conscience that pricks. Adding a perfect life to the front of the room only exaggerates the pricking. Plato quotes Socrates on how disrespectful kids are these days. The Mesopotamians could not live up to Hammurabi’s code and knew it. Pick any pagan philosopher or poet and you will find a standard its own author is failing.

And we cheat the measurement anyway. “The standard isn’t, are you better than any random guy you find in a bus,” Matt said. “I’m probably better than average.” The standard is the glory of God.

“Jesus could have just sort of poofed, or arrived fully adult in a spaceship, with angels and fanfare and fireworks and a decent soundtrack. He could have articulated the dos and don’ts of humanity so well.”

► 1:33:22

Then the confession, on himself. In high school he went to his older brother Eric — always the better-read one — to ask whether Barnes & Noble sold a book of just the sayings of Jesus. He was going to meditate on it and become a better man. Eric pointed out he owned a Bible and could read the red

letters. Matt knew that. He wanted it in its own binding, to be read the way you would read a book of aphorisms. That was the plan for his life.

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

LUKE 24:25-26 ↗

Necessary. Not the icing on a very good cake.

4. The gospel is a list of events

► 1:36:09

Matt set up 1 Corinthians 15 by lingering deliberately on Paul’s preamble — the gospel you received, in which you stand, by which you are being saved — to make the room feel how much weight is about to land, and then asked what people expect to find there. Great news, we can finally pull it off if we all band together. Great news, here is a do-over; try harder.

“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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-5 ↗

Every item is something that happened, with a significance attached: he died *for our sins*, he was raised *according to God’s plan*, he appeared — to five hundred at once, most of them still alive to be asked. Paul is not composing; he is handing on what he received.

“*It’s not a vibe. We’re not just vibing.*”

► 1:39:18

Which is why the core of Christianity cannot be “what would Jesus do.” Not only can you not copy most of Jesus’ life, you were never invited to. Matt pitched a sketch for the church’s hypothetical channel of dumb skits — a man who takes WWJD too far. *Pastor, how do I become a Jewish Messiah? How do I die a substitutionary death? Can I rule over and nourish the church with my flesh?* Absolutely not. Get out.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

1 PETER 2:24 ↗

We do not self-correct from death to life. He is the propitiation for our sins — an act that makes things right with God on God’s own terms — and not for ours only but for the sins of the world. Jesus is not a new guru appended to a long list. We follow him in obedience, but we follow him to the cross:

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”

ROMANS 6:5-6 ↗

5. You cannot swap the bag of sand for the idol

► 1:44:09

The image Matt reached for was Indiana Jones easing the golden head off the pedestal and slipping the sandbag into its place. You cannot swap out what Jesus *did* for what would Jesus *do*. A Christianity built on a changed life, with the death and resurrection bolted on as an accessory, ends up holding neither. A Christianity that holds the core will also produce the changed life. Both or neither.

► 1:46:00

He pressed on what he kept calling Christian humanism by asking what it has to say to two people. To the genuinely upstanding man it has nothing to offer — no reason he needs anything. To the man who cut you off in traffic and has a bad attitude at work, it has a verdict and no help. “Do better” is the rally cry of dead religion, and it sounds good because it feels good. Neither person is served, because neither is the point. The point is a transfer out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son. As Steve likes to say, the church is not called Nice Folks Chapel.

“It’s hard for me as a servant of Christ to judge how much Jesus has already done in your life,” Matt said. “He died for us and incorporated us into his body. And that’s still true even if you mess up and you’ve failed and you need to go back to him again and again and again.”

6. Obedience is the freedom, not the price of it

► 1:51:52

Matt named the negotiation most of us attempt: I will follow you, and these particular desires stay in their own corner, and as long as they keep the minority share we have a deal. If that is the arrangement, Jesus will be a gigantic problem in your life, and he does not go away. If what you actually want is liberty, then he is a problem for the kingdom of darkness instead, and to you he is a liberator. That is why the yoke is easy and the burden light — he is exchanging our death for his life. He does not want you reformed. He wants you dead with him, so you can share his resurrection.

► 1:53:05

He closed on the courtroom. You do not unlock salvation as a boss level once you have done a certain amount of Jesusing; the chains were broken while you were still a sinner. So when you stand there, your defense is not the highlight reel of your own improvement — *God, did you see that?*

“*Your plea is Jesus. Your attorney is Jesus. The whole argument is Jesus.*”

And then, characteristically, he put himself in the same seat as the room: “I need reminding of that. I assume you need reminding of that.” The prayer was “we believe you, but help us in our unbelief.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- John 19:15–17
- Luke 13:1
- Isaiah 53:9
- John 19:23–24
- Psalm 22:16–18
- John 19:26–27
- Matthew 12:48–50
- John 19:28–30
- John 13:35
- Luke 24:25–26
- 1 Corinthians 15:3–5
- 1 Peter 2:24
- 1 John 2:2
- Romans 6:5–6
- Matthew 11:30
- Romans 5:8
- Mark 9:24

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt showed that the placard, the tunic and the two criminals were all written down centuries before. What does it change for you to read the crucifixion as planned rather than as something that happened to Jesus?
2. Where have you quietly been measuring yourself against the average person in the room rather than against the glory of God — and what does that comparison protect you from feeling?
3. Matt wanted the sayings of Jesus in their own binding so he could become a better man. What is your version of that book, and what does it leave out?
4. If someone in your life is failing badly right now, what does “do better” offer them, and what does “Christ died for our sins” offer them instead?
5. Name the corner you have been negotiating to keep. What would it look like this week to treat obedience there as freedom rather than as the price of it?

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=_w-GQTgpAcQ&t=4623s

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.