

The Tiger Woods of Sermons

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, June 1, 2025
PASSAGES	Ephesians 6; 1 Peter 5; James 4; Matthew 23; Luke 14; Philippians 2; 1 Peter 2
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:11:49 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Spiritual warfare is real, and the devil is not the strongest thing that can stand against you. God is. Pride is what moves you from one side of that fight to the other — and the most dangerous kind of pride is the kind that has learned to talk like humility.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Both extremes on spiritual warfare are wrong: a demon under every rock, or nothing but mental illness and misunderstanding. Jesus cast out devils constantly, and he was not confused about what he was doing.
- ◆ We are given armor, not costume. It is not visible to anyone and it is not for show — it is issued because there is an actual battle.
- ◆ Resisting the devil is hard, especially under temptation, but the outcome is settled: he is the one who runs.
- ◆ There is one opponent you will never overcome, and it is God himself. “God opposes the proud” is the one line in the inventory that most people never check.
- ◆ The “Tiger Woods principle” — true humility is just accurate self-assessment — has an internal logic, but run it through the scribes and Pharisees and watch what it produces.
- ◆ Humans do not ship with humility as the factory setting. Self-assessment is exactly the instrument we cannot trust.
- ◆ Jesus had every privilege and did not exploit one of them. Struck at his own trial, he did not answer back; he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

- ◆ You would rather humble yourself than be humbled. God is willing to oblige, and in hindsight you will wish you had gone first.

► 1:11:49

Matt came in holding books. Two by Gabriel Amorth, the Roman Catholic priest who worked for the Vatican and performed exorcisms as his actual job — *An Exorcist Tells His Story*, which Matt allowed was “a little on the nose as far as titles go,” and the sequel it earned. One by the Protestant writer Neil Anderson. He left them out for anyone who wanted them.

1. Neither a demon under every rock nor nothing at all

► 1:14:01

He named both ditches. On one side, the believer for whom everything is a devil — traffic included. Matt used to own a book called *When in Doubt, Cast It Out*. On the other side, the tidier assumption that anything dark or strange is mental illness or a misreading. That one has a problem: Jesus spent an enormous amount of his ministry casting out devils, and you have to conclude either that he was doing nothing, or that he was primitive and confused. Neither works. Which leaves the question of why he did it so often — and the answer that our life with God sits inside a bigger frame than sin, forgiveness, and Bible reading.

► 1:15:01

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

EPHESIANS 6:11–12 ↗

Worth remembering, Matt said, on the days we genuinely hate people for what they have done — they are not the real enemy. And note the wardrobe: “We wear the armor of God, not the silk pajamas of God.” Nobody can see it, so it is not for looks. It is issued because there is a fight.

► 1:17:37

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

1 PETER 5:8–9 ↗

What Matt liked about Amorth — read first in middle school, reread since — was the perspective in the opening chapters: do not be afraid of the devil, because Jesus is so much more powerful. Yes, and also resist him, because he wants you destroyed. He would be glad for you to do it yourself, and glad to help.

Then James 4:7 — “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” — which lands almost anticlimactically next to the Hollywood version where the priest goes out the window. Resisting is hard, particularly where temptation is involved. But when we stand firm in faith, he is the one running. This is not for an elite class of Christian; it applies whether or not you feel enlisted.

2. The opponent you will never beat

► 1:19:59

Matt admitted the setup was clickbait, then said it anyway. There is one spiritual opponent you will never overcome, no matter what phrasing you download from a warfare guru online — and that is God himself, when you find yourself opposing him.

“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

1 PETER 5:5 ↗

James 4:6 says it in the same words — a repeat verse, and repeated things are usually important. Matt's pastoral observation was specific: people come to him stuck, with chronic trouble, certain something is opposing them, and *God himself resisting me* is not anywhere on the inventory. Am I walking in so much pride that I have made this hard for myself? That item drops off the checklist entirely.

► 1:22:50

He read Jesus on the scribes and Pharisees — the broad phylacteries, the long fringes, the best seats, the greetings in the marketplace, the title *rabbi* — and then the reversal:

“The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

MATTHEW 23:11-12 ↗

He fumbled the last word on the first pass — “whoever humbles himself will be exhausted” — and the room caught it. He took the correction with good humor and offered a theory he could not prove: it will probably go better for you if you humble yourself than if you let God do it. From the seats, Jack: don't get to where you have to prove it. The Lord is willing to oblige, Matt said, but that is a kind of brokenness you would rather have chosen.

3. The Tiger Woods principle

► 1:26:15

Here is where the message turned. Pride, Matt argued, can rebrand and slip back into a Christian's life wearing a redefined humility. The version he has heard most often gets attached to Tiger Woods, sometimes Michael Jordan: it would not be humble for Tiger to pretend he isn't good at golf, because true humility is knowing exactly where you stand. That's not pride, that's accuracy.

The church's appropriation of it goes: God made you special, you are highly favored and destined for greatness, so stand tall and take your place. Matt read quotes from well-known Christian teachers without naming them. “Humility is not about denying your greatness. It's about recognizing that your greatness comes from God.” “Humility is not bowing down to others. It's standing. You are a champion. Claim your place at the top. That's where God has destined you.”

He was honest that some of it appeals to him and the logic holds together — golf is measurable, third parties keep score. His challenge was not to the syllogism but to the application. Feed that same logic to the scribes and Pharisees and watch what comes out of it.

“I am the Tiger Woods of rabbis. I have done so much Torah. I've earned it. And honestly, if I don't take that place of honor, some other bozo rabbi is going to do it.”

► 1:30:37

Which is precisely the room Jesus walked into:

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him... But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’... For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

LUKE 14:8–11 ↗

Run the rebrand at that banquet and it collapses logistically — everyone claiming the top seat at once. And the man who does get bumped had every reason to think he was distinguished. He was. That was the whole problem.

► 1:32:49

Matt did not pretend this is easy to adjudicate. There are times we know the right thing, have the experience behind it, and act with confidence. There are also times the royalty vibe goes much too far, and we are not reliable at telling the difference.

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” The principle might hold if we were accurately assessing ourselves — but humility is not the factory setting, batteries included. Nobody is born prone to it.

And the stakes are not reputational trivia: Proverbs 16:17–19 — pride goes before destruction, and better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud. Proverbs 11:2–3 — when pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.

4. Did Jesus know his worth and take what was his?

► 1:35:19

He was no pushover — he did not ask demons to leave, he told them. But he never made anyone worship him or insisted on the respect he was owed. Matt imagined the gospel that was not written: *Excuse me, did you just strike me? I could walk on water.* What the gospels say instead is that he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. If I do not defend myself at all times, who will? Probably not my neighbor, and certainly not the person oppressing me. Which is what Psalms 37:7–11 is for: be still before the Lord, fret not, refrain from anger — the meek shall inherit the land. With the obvious caveats. If you are a law officer, a soldier, a parent, you protect your charges. The target here is us, feverishly asserting ourselves and then reaching for a spiritual justification after the fact.

► 1:38:13

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves... 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.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:3–6 ↗

“It'd be real funny if Paul in parenthesis said, ‘Well, I mean, unless you actually are better.’” On *grasped*, Matt noted the Greek study Hope did on this a couple of years back: the sense is exploited. Jesus held the divine privileges. He simply refused to use them for himself. [Romans 12:14–16](#) follows the same line — associate with the lowly, never be wise in your own sight.

► 1:40:24

The questions he left for the distressed ego were plain. Can I trust God to take care of me? Can he maintain my reputation? Can I honor someone as greater than myself even when I am fairly sure I am the Michael Jordan of this situation? Can I tolerate a lower place, and being a servant? Yes, we are children of the King and a royal priesthood — Matt was emphatic that he is all about that. It just does not cash out at the church potluck as “I’m so blessed and favored, I’ll go first and take the lion’s share of the brisket.” Spiritual language does not make it less goofy.

5. Fall on the rock

► 1:41:43

If we get this wrong, what is at stake is not a little intermittent disgrace. It is making God our adversary, and there is no victory in those cards. Then the turn: this is an old problem with a long streak, and God has already answered it. In his own humility Jesus died for us while we were his enemies — not exploiting divine privilege but taking on a broken humanity on purpose, letting us break his body and shed his blood. Matt’s counsel for anyone who did not know what to do with any of it: you do not want the rock to fall on you. Fall on the rock. Going to him and saying *I entrust myself to you* is itself the first act of humility.

“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. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

1 PETER 2:23–25 ↗

► 1:44:24

The recap was short. Take warfare seriously and soberly. But of everything that might oppose you, the devil is not the boss level. And the reason we cannot simply self-report our way clear is that we grade ourselves generously — “on the topic of pride and humility, I'm doing pretty good in this category, honestly. Might be one of the most humble guys I know.” Watch for the rebrand. *I'm just being accurate, bro.* This is as old as the garden and the same question every time: why shouldn't I reach out and take my place at the top? So humble yourself before God, who is the strong tower and the defender, and who has opened a way even for us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Ephesians 6:11–12
- 1 Peter 5:8–9
- James 4:7
- 1 Peter 5:5
- James 4:6
- Matthew 23:11–12
- Luke 14:8–11
- Proverbs 14:12
- Proverbs 16:17–19
- Proverbs 11:2–3
- Psalm 37:7–11
- Philippians 2:3–6
- Romans 12:14–16
- 1 Peter 2:23–25

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Which ditch do you naturally fall into — a devil behind everything, or nothing but circumstances and chemistry? What has shaped that?
2. Matt said “God himself opposing me” never makes it onto most people's inventory when things are stuck. When you last felt stuck, did you consider it?
3. Where does the Tiger Woods principle sound most reasonable to you, and what would it produce in your life if you followed it all the way out?
4. Jesus held every privilege and exploited none of them. Which of your privileges is hardest to hold that way?
5. Where is God asking you to humble yourself this week, before circumstances do it for you?

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=gXwl9eRT0iw&t=4309s>

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.