

Children of Light

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, July 20, 2025
PASSAGES	Ephesians 4; Ephesians 5; Romans 12; Isaiah 60
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:11:59 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Humans are instinctively transactional with God — buy him off, get him off our backs, earn some favor. Paul cuts under all of it: we are beloved children who were once darkness and are now light, and the walking-in-light that follows is not payment but freedom. Which means the first move is not cleaning yourself up. It is letting yourself be seen.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ♦ Christianity is not pay-to-play. Jesus has left it all on the field — incarnation, death for enemies, a self he will never take back. What we have is transformation, not transaction.
- ♦ When God says no to sin, that is grace. A good shepherd does not lead sheep to a distant trash dump; his no is a yes to what he actually wants for us.
- ♦ Repentance is active. Not “I’m sorry,” and not even “I’m sorry and I feel bad” — the thief stops stealing *and* starts working so he has something to share.
- ♦ Anger is not automatically sin — God gets angry, Jesus got angry. Stewing in it, gripping it, holding on to it is the part that ruins you.
- ♦ The verse pairs sexual immorality with covetousness in one breath. Greed is harder to see and it is called idolatry; root it out with the same zeal.
- ♦ Forgiving one another is not generosity from the high ground. Christ forgave *this room* an immense amount, secret and obvious both, and much-forgiven people love much.

- ◆ Follow the chain backward: what is visible is light, and what becomes visible does so by being exposed. So step one is not to shine. It is to be exposed by the light of Christ.
- ◆ Walking in the light is deliberate. “Look carefully” rules out going with the flow of whatever darkness is nearest.

► 1:12:01

Matt opened by gathering up where Ephesians has been. Paul keeps saying *in him* — the blessings are not adjacent to Jesus, the promises are not yes and amen somewhere in his general vicinity. “Don’t feel too comfortable being near the church, mixed in with the church, knowing people who know Jesus,” Matt said. “In him is where you belong.”

Transaction or transformation

► 1:14:07

Every culture, past and present, runs the same instinct: how do I get you off my back, God, or how do I buy your favor. Pray more, read more, be loved more. Matt refused the premise. “He has left it all on the field. Even when we were his enemies, he died for us. He’s given us his whole self. He incarnated, took on human flesh — these are things he’ll never undo. That’s how all in he is.”

So the good works of the next four chapters are not payment. They are what people do who have been transferred out of one kingdom into another — and even the prohibitions are part of the rescue. Matt tied it to a shepherd leading sheep away from rushing water they are terrified of: “When God says no to sin, that is grace. It is love and it’s freedom.”

Put off, put on

► 1:16:57

“You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart... But that is not the way you learned Christ.”

EPHESIANS 4:17–20 ↗

The expectation is fingerprints — evidence, fruit. “Whoever the Son sets free is free indeed,” and that freedom makes itself known. We have been carried from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of

the beloved Son ([Colossians 1:13](#)), and the thief who comes to steal and kill and destroy has no business setting the terms of a life Jesus came to make abundant ([John 10:10](#)).

Matt pressed on where fruit actually comes from. Not from a prayer said in college, not from a baptism thirty years ago. “Even now, ten years later, twenty years later, thirty years later — abide in him. That’s where the promise is.” The old self was crucified with Jesus ([Ephesians 4:22–24](#)); what counts now is a new creation, free to do the good works God prepared beforehand ([Ephesians 2:10](#)).

► [1:19:54](#)

He set that beside Romans 12, and returned to it later in the message, because it names something we only get to do on this side of glory:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God.”

[ROMANS 12:1–2](#) ↗

Serving him when your body hurts, when you are confused, depressed, persecuted — none of that will be available after this life. “We get to offer him a literal sacrifice now. We won’t have that chance later.”

What repentance looks like on a Tuesday

► [1:20:59](#)

“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”

[EPHESIANS 4:28](#) ↗

Repentance is a turn, not an apology with feeling attached. And it is yours to make — “I can’t reach into your heart and grab the steering wheel,” Matt said, though he added, thanks be to God, that we have a high priest who can reach those inner places.

► [1:22:25](#)

Paul is quoting the Old Testament here. “Speak the truth to one another” comes out of a passage where God announces he has purposed to do good to Jerusalem ([Zechariah 8:16](#)) — the command is a blessing, not a mood. Matt had no patience for the alternative’s reputation: “The culture would like us

to think the kingdom of darkness is cool and edgy. It's super duper lame. Lies are lame." He worked the edge cases anyway. A surprise party has a deadline and intends the truth, so it is not a lie. What passes between a husband and wife behind closed doors is private, not deceit. Withholding vital information purely to benefit yourself is lying. And unfiltered stream of consciousness is not truth-telling either — "a mature person knows to live by the truth and to carefully guard their mouth."

► 1:25:29

"Be angry and do not sin" echoes Psalm 4:4, with its instruction to ponder on your bed and be silent. Anger will come; anger is not inherently sinful. Your response is the part you manage. Matt admitted he does not read "do not let the sun go down on your anger" as a curfew on sleep — some things really are enraging — but Paul lists anger again among the things to put away (Ephesians 4:31), and he had looked up whether it was the same word. It is. The distinction he drew: anger happens to you; stewing in it and gripping it is what you do with it.

► 1:26:26

On Ephesians 4:29 — talk that builds up and gives grace — he named the categories plainly: foul language ("that one is tough for me"), inappropriate humor, bad-mouthing someone who is not in the room, and Christian gossip, which is ordinary gossip dressed as a prayer request. Pray for Sister Susie, you know, because of her husband. And then, five minutes later, a very small actual prayer.

Forgiven much

► 1:28:01

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

EPHESIANS 4:31-32 ↗

Two of Jesus' stories sit under that verse. The servant forgiven an enormous debt who then goes and throttles a man over a trivial one (Matthew 18:23-35) — and the woman with the alabaster jar at the Pharisee's table, where Simon answers his own question correctly and convicts himself doing it (Luke 7:36-47). Whoever has been forgiven much loves much.

Then Matt turned the "us" of *forgave us* back on the room. "Lest we forget, the us of 'Christ forgave us' is not cream-of-the-crop humanity. What he has forgiven this room — the secret stuff, the obvious stuff — is an immense magnitude." Which is why the kindness runs downhill: God was tenderhearted toward us, so we are tenderhearted toward each other.

► 1:31:02

That is exactly how Paul pivots — “be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love.” Matt lingered on the title. “I don’t know if you’ve really cherished it recently, but you are beloved children of God.” And to the objection everyone was already forming — but have you *seen* these people — he had two answers. Christ died for us while we were actively his enemies. And: “How else could we learn unconditional love if all we’re ever asked to do is love people who meet all our conditions?”

The one you didn’t look at

► 1:33:37

Sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness — Paul lists them together and calls the covetous man an idolater (Ephesians 5:3–5). Matt noticed which word our eyes go to. Let them, he said; that one is there. But let them also land on greed, which is harder to see and is not confined to people who look wealthy. Money is not the root of all evil; the love of it is a root of all kinds. “The same zeal we should have to root out sexual immorality should be embraced for rooting out greed.” Filthiness and crude joking get replaced, and the replacement is specific: thanksgiving. That is repentance again — not an empty mouth, a differently full one.

You were darkness. You are light.

► 1:35:01

“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”

EPHESIANS 5:8–9 ↗

Matt flagged how intense the grammar is. Not *walked in* darkness — *were* darkness. Not walking in light — *are* light. He traced the thread back to Isaiah, where the remnant is told that raising up the tribes of Jacob is too small a thing: “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). Then to the one who claims that title outright — “I am the light of the world” — and who turns and hands it to his disciples (Matthew 5:14). Hidden in Christ, the ancient promise gets fulfilled through us; it is his light on us that makes us light.

Step one is being seen

► 1:38:50

This was the turn of the message, and Matt ran Paul's logic in reverse.

Anything exposed by the light becomes visible, and anything visible is light. So if you do not feel like you are in the light, do not start by trying to shine. Start by becoming visible. And if you want to be visible — be exposed by the light.

In practice: time with him, his word, confession one to another, opening up about where you have been lying. "You might feel more free gripping tightly on those dark spots you're trying to keep hidden. That's not freedom. That's a prison." He anticipated the flinch, too. If it were a random guy asking, he would not trust the random guy either. "Jesus is not a random guy. He's a tender, kind, humble and lowly shepherd. You can trust him."

He was careful about the other half of the command — exposing the unfruitful works of darkness is not a license for the people whose whole ministry is hunting for imperfections to take a ministry down. It means shining Christ's light, not collecting scalps.

► 1:40:53

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead" is likely an early Christian hymn, and Matt traced its roots: Isaiah's bleak admission that the nation had writhed and given birth to wind, followed by the promise that the dead shall live and those who dwell in the dust shall awake and sing (Isaiah 26:18–19) — God's victory over the last enemy. And then:

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you."

ISAIAH 60:1–2 ↗

On purpose

► 1:42:02

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise." Matt read "look carefully" as premeditation. It is the opposite of going with the flow of whatever is around you — the same posture as the angry person who stops to reflect before answering. And Paul keeps circling back to discerning the will of the Lord, which Matt took as a hint that it is worth doing on purpose rather than by accident.

► 1:43:12

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

EPHESIANS 5:18-20 ↗

Being drunk means being under an influence, so Matt asked what it looks like to be under the Spirit's. He told on himself twice. Once he got off a bus so full of joy he felt giddy, asked the first man he saw whether he wanted to come to church, and the man — waiting at a bus stop, presumably to leave — simply followed him to campus worship. Another time, by the eggs at Walmart, he knew God wanted him to speak and it came out like a boy failing to flirt. The man said, let me stop you right there, I don't want to talk to you. “That's kind of a relief, because this wasn't going well.”

Both, he insisted, are good. “It's so good when it's easy. And it's also so good that we get to serve him when it's hard, because that's a gift you give him.” He ended where he started, with the identity rather than the assignment: because we are, after all, children of light. That is who you are as beloved children.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Ephesians 4:17–20
- John 8:36
- Colossians 1:13
- John 10:10
- Ephesians 4:22–24
- Ephesians 2:10
- Romans 12:1–2
- Ephesians 4:28
- Zechariah 8:16
- Psalm 4:4
- Ephesians 4:31
- Ephesians 4:29
- Ephesians 4:31–32
- Matthew 18:23–35
- Luke 7:36–47
- Ephesians 5:1–2
- Ephesians 5:3–5
- Ephesians 5:8–9
- Isaiah 49:6
- John 8:12
- Matthew 5:14
- Ephesians 5:13–14
- Isaiah 26:18–19
- Isaiah 60:1–2
- Ephesians 5:15–17
- Ephesians 5:18–20

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where does your instinct still run transactional with God — what are you quietly trying to pay him with, and what would it change to stop?
2. Matt said repentance is a turn, not an apology. Name a place where you have said sorry more than once but never actually turned the wheel.
3. Paul puts covetousness in the same breath as sexual immorality. Which of the two do you scrutinize in yourself, and which do you let slide?
4. “What he has forgiven this room is an immense magnitude.” Who is currently on the receiving end of your small-debt bookkeeping?
5. If step one is being exposed by the light rather than shining, what is the one dark spot you are gripping — and who will you make it visible to 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=_wfOuj4efk&t=4319s

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.