

God's Initiative

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 21, 2025
PASSAGES	Genesis 12; Genesis 22; Luke 1; Luke 2; Daniel 2
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:55:31 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

That God would come and dwell among us was *his* idea, and he has never once depended on us coming through for him. Abraham and Mary were handed impossible promises, not assignments to fulfil them. So can the church, and so can you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ A steady diet of doubt and fear makes doubt start to feel smarter than faith. The end of that road is quietly acting as though God is asleep at the wheel.
- ◆ We would never say God is asleep — we just take up his burden as though he were, and it burns us out fast.
- ◆ Abraham was not chosen because he had a head start. He and Sarah could not have children at all; the one time they tried to help God along, it became a cautionary tale.
- ◆ “The Lord is with you” in scripture means God is doing something enormous and you are invited in. It does not mean God has become your assistant.
- ◆ Gabriel gave Mary an announcement, not a job interview. Not *you could be* the mother of the Messiah if you do the right things — *you will conceive*.
- ◆ Mary and Joseph did not have to make Jesus into the Messiah. He simply was one. God's promises have legs of their own.
- ◆ Run the whole story — Joseph, Moses, the judges, David, the prophets, Esther, the return from exile, Pentecost, Paul — and find one place where God needed our cleverness. There isn't one.

- ◆ The question is not “how are we going to make this happen?” It is “God is going to make this happen — how could I be a part of it?”

► 0:55:31

Matt set two things side by side. First, that God would dwell among us was his own idea. Second, he has shown the energy and momentum to accomplish his own plans, and from what Matt can tell has never depended on us coming through for him. The rest of the message was an argument that those two facts should change how a Christian reads the news.

The steady diet of doubt

► 0:56:06

Matt described growing up a millennial being told constantly that the church in America is retreating and shrinking — concern-trolled, as he put it, or rage-baited in the newer vocabulary. Is Christianity in the West shrinking? Is social decay rampant? Will every tribe and tongue actually hear the gospel? Will the church implode from lack of confidence?

► 0:57:10

Some of those fears are not reasonable, but listen to the enemy long enough and “doubt starts feeling smarter than faith.” The side effect is subtle: “We start thinking that God is essentially asleep at the wheel. We wouldn't say that. We just act like it. And we then take on his crushing burden to make all of his promises come true.”

► 0:57:40

Matt was hardest on his own profession here. Preachers working from that mindset scold with words like whips — *come on, guys, we have to make this happen, because God is doing his Weekend at Bernie's thing and if we don't go, no one will*. As if the Great Commission were Jesus digging into his first-century pockets, tossing the disciples the keys, and saying keep it running for me.

Abraham: a promise given to a childless man

► 0:58:43

Two people received impossible-sounding promises, and how they took them is the whole lesson.

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

GENESIS 12:1-3 ↗

► 0:59:57

Matt lingered on the target audience: *all the families of the earth*. Every tribe, every region, every people group, every corner and corridor. And then the obvious question — was Abraham selected because he had a running start, already a father of twenty or thirty, half the work done? The opposite. He and Sarah could not have children at all. When the waiting stretched on, Sarah proposed Hagar as a way to get God's promise moving (Genesis 16) — fear and desperation deciding to make it happen. Matt let that stand as a cautionary tale and moved on.

► 1:01:26

The child came, late. And then came the harder request, and the oath that followed the ram:

“By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore... and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

GENESIS 22:16-18 ↗

That *offspring* is singular — one particular descendant through whom every family of the earth gets blessed. Abraham obeyed without knowing the mechanism, trusting God to restore or resurrect the boy somehow. Obedience, yes. But underneath it, confidence that God would follow through on what God said.

Mary: an announcement, not an audition

► 1:02:58

That singular offspring is promised to a young woman in Nazareth.

“And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.”

LUKE 1:28-29 ↗

► 1:04:11

Mary is favored by God's choice, Matt said — not because she had been reading up on how to raise a Messiah, not because she went to school on being a virgin who gives birth. And that Old Testament phrase carries freight: “The Lord is with you conveys that God is doing a great big thing and you get to be included if you want to join. It doesn't mean God is your assistant and this is your project. It's the other way around.”

► 1:05:49

Read what Gabriel actually says in Luke 1:30–33 and notice the grammar of it. *You will conceive. He will be great. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. Of his kingdom there will be no end.* None of that is a request. “This isn't a list of requests. Hey, Mary, can you make the following things happen? She's being told.”

Her question is the reasonable one — how, since she is a virgin — and Gabriel answers with the Holy Spirit, with Elizabeth's impossible pregnancy, and with a sentence that covers both: “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Elizabeth was barren but married, Matt noted; Mary's situation is “impossibler.” He guessed she still had questions afterward, and said he would have. Her answer came anyway:

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

LUKE 1:38 ↗

► 1:09:14

Then the shepherds arrive with their own angelic report (Luke 2:8–14), and Luke records what Mary did with all of it — she “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19), while the shepherds went back glorifying God. Neither response is a chore. Nobody is scheming about Messiah school, Messiah nursery songs, or when the training starts.

The boy in the temple

► 1:10:25

Matt read the Passover trip, the day's journey home, the three-day search, and the twelve-year-old found among the teachers — his parents astonished, his mother asking why he had treated them this way, and the boy answering, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” ([Luke 2:41–49](#)).

► [1:11:47](#)

The point is what Mary and Joseph are *not* doing. Not the parents hauling a talented kid to auditions. Imagine them carrying our doubt and fear — how do we make him the Messiah, what do we feed him, which nursery songs. “He just is the Messiah whether they push him into it or not. God's promises have legs of their own.”

Which puts us where, exactly?

► [1:12:23](#)

We were born further down the line — after Jesus lived, taught, died, rose, ascended, and left a church — into the stretch of the story where the Great Commission is being fulfilled and every tribe and language finds its final destiny in the glory of Jesus. From the inside it feels daunting, especially for Westerners kept on that diet of scolding.

► [1:13:38](#)

But God has declared it, not requested it. Daniel tells a king that the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed ([Daniel 2:44](#)) — “this wasn't a passive-aggressive suggestion.” Habakkuk's promise that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea ([Habakkuk 2:14](#)) is not wishful thinking. Which is why Abraham and Mary were put in front of us: we hold real promises in one hand and real weakness in the other, and the honest response can sound like hers. *How can this be, since we're incompetent? How is this kingdom going to stand forever? Have you seen us?*

Run the whole story and find the place we came through

► [1:15:26](#)

Then Matt walked the Bible at speed, and the cumulative weight was the argument. Abram was chosen with no human prompting. Joseph reached Egypt through dreams, betrayal and providence — “it wasn't because of human cleverness that God saved the day. It was in spite of human schemes.” Moses was raised from infancy through strange circumstances and given Aaron as help; he did not arm-wrestle Pharaoh, and Israel did not have the better army. In the wilderness and the cycles of the judges, God kept raising up deliverers by his own initiative. When a kingdom finally existed, Samuel was sent past every human expectation — past the biggest, wisest, richest, strongest — to anoint a

shepherd boy. Prophets were conscripted rather than recruited: “I know you didn't apply for this job, but you're hired.” Esther was positioned for such a time as this without seeking it (Esther 4:14).

► 1:18:10

And the detail Matt clearly enjoyed: for everyone frightened that there are simply too many pagans out there for God's will to be done, the return from exile was initiated by pagan rulers. Then Mary. Then the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Then disciples minding their own business — *you're hired, follow me*. Then the Spirit poured out because Jesus is the baptizer, not because the apostles found the cheat codes. Then Paul, so counterproductive for the kingdom that his hiring required a dramatic divine interruption. “Jesus can hire whoever he wants.”

So change the question

► 1:20:10

Matt made the turn and then repeated it deliberately, because it is the whole message: “At what point in this story about God's interaction with humankind was it we who had to make it happen? Instead we can think — God is going to make this happen. How could I be a part of it? What is he asking me to do?”

► 1:22:04

He imagined the verse that does not exist anywhere in scripture — God confiding to an angel that he really hopes they come through, because he was depending on them and is a bit behind the eight ball. Funny, and sad, and not in the book. God is the one who works all things according to the counsel of his will, through pagan rulers or otherwise, because it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

► 1:25:03

The application was gentle and specific. Maybe today your response is simply the shepherds' response — rejoice. Maybe it is going back to what God has already told you to do and seeing it in a new light: he is with me, meaning he is doing it and I am helping. Matt returned to Esther for the last word, and to Mordecai rather than the famous verse: if you don't, God will raise up another deliverer. His plans will not fail. You might — God won't.

► 1:25:40

So if you deeply want the knowledge of the glory of God to cover the earth, that is going to happen. If you want all the families of the earth blessed in Jesus, that will happen. If you are worried the church will crumble under its own pathetic weirdness, it won't — “this is his body, his bride. He's always been our great shepherd and captain and defender and lord and lifegiver and the seeker and the saver of the lost. He's always been awake.” We are the ones who fall asleep at the wheel, and it takes no prophet to

point that out. What takes faith is remembering everything he has done and believing he can do what he said and more than we can ask or imagine.

Matt closed by praying for the Spirit to come in great measure and stir up faith — faith like Abraham's, *all right, let's go*, and like Mary's, *let it be as you said* — and asked God to strengthen our unbelief with his mercies. The heart ministry team stayed up front to pray with anyone who wanted it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Genesis 12:1–3](#)
- [Genesis 16](#)
- [Genesis 22:16–18](#)
- [Luke 1:28–29](#)
- [Luke 1:30–33](#)
- [Luke 1:37](#)
- [Luke 1:38](#)
- [Luke 2:8–14](#)
- [Luke 2:19](#)
- [Luke 2:41–49](#)
- [Daniel 2:44](#)
- [Habakkuk 2:14](#)
- [Esther 4:14](#)
- [Ephesians 1:11](#)
- [Philippians 2:13](#)
- [Ephesians 3:20](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where has a steady diet of bad news about the church started to feel like clear-eyed realism to you rather than what Matt called doubt dressed up as intelligence?
2. Sarah's plan with Hagar came from fear that the promise was stalling. What promise are you currently tempted to help God along with?
3. Mary asked "how will this be?" and still said "let it be to me." What would it look like to hold a real question and real consent at the same time?
4. Walk your own history the way Matt walked Israel's. Where did God act without needing your cleverness, and had you filed it under something else?
5. Swap the question this week: not "how am I going to make this happen," but "God is going to do this — what is he asking me to contribute?" What changes on Monday because of that?

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=u-RnK8whaR8&t=3331s>

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.