

Wages of Sin; Free Gift of Life

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, February 1, 2026
PASSAGES	Romans 1; Romans 2; Romans 3; Romans 4; Romans 5; Romans 6; Galatians 3; John 8; Genesis 2–5; Hebrews 7
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:18:14 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Paul tells the Adam story so that he can invert it. In Adam we did not merely inherit a bad example — we sinned, and we died. In Christ we are not merely forgiven at one narrow point on Good Friday; we are included in his whole person, his cradle-to-grave obedience included. That inclusion, not a better run at the old religion, is the answer to every practical question about sin.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The Roman church was a Jewish-and-Gentile church that had been forcibly made Gentile and then re-mixed. Paul is not shaming either side; he is pointing both to Jesus.
- ◆ Romans reads like a magic eye picture. Once you see the person of Jesus towering over every verse, you cannot unsee it — and until you do, no commentary will help.
- ◆ What Abraham discovered was that he could not make God's promise happen by his own maneuvering. He was counted righteous before circumcision, before Isaac.
- ◆ "In Adam we sinned" is not a figure of speech. The same logic that has Levi tithing while still in Abraham's loins is the logic that puts us in Christ's death, his resurrection, and his obedience.
- ◆ Paul answers "shall we sin, then?" with Jesus' identity rather than a moral argument. People already know sin is wrong when they are doing it.
- ◆ You cannot order à la carte from Jesus. You are baptized into the whole person, so the resurrection comes with the death.
- ◆ The reason God works by process rather than by instant zap is that he wants a relationship, not an updated file.

► 1:18:15

Matt admitted at the outset that starting Romans before Advent was a strategic error — go too fast and people miss things, go too slow and nobody remembers chapter one. With chapters 7 through 11 just around the corner, and those being the hard ones, he spent the first stretch re-orienting the room.

The church this letter was written into

► 1:19:13

Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. For roughly a decade the church there grew, evangelized and developed its leadership as a decisively Gentile body — so the Jewish believers who were finally allowed back came home to a church they did not recognize. The questions that follow are the ones humming behind Galatians too: should Gentiles live like Jews, or should Jews stop being Jewish? There is ancient evidence of Jews in Rome seeking reversal surgeries to pass as Gentile. What does it mean to be included?

► 1:20:37

Paul opens with the answer: the obedience of faith among all the nations. That was the promise to Abraham, and “every nation” means exactly that. “God never wanted to be a tribal deity for just one tribe,” Matt said. “He was going global all along.” This is not a last-minute hail Mary.

The magic eye

► 1:21:39

People ask him which commentary to buy. His answer is that you do not need Greek or Hebrew; you need to see that Paul is not building a philosophy, a lifestyle or vaguely religious vibes. The person of Jesus overshadows every verse. Like those dot-pattern books from the early nineties, once you see the image you cannot unsee it — and if you cannot, a magnifying glass will not help. Some commentaries leave Romans sounding like an unsolvable book. It is not. It is nothing but Christ and him crucified, which is why there is no boasting anywhere in it — Paul counts even his own zealous résumé as rubbish, and the Greek word is considerably coarser than that. The best interpretive lens, Matt said, is simply being a sheep who knows his voice.

What Abraham discovered

► 1:23:57

In Paul’s day Abraham was commonly held up as righteous because of how he obeyed. Paul retells it scandalously. The question in chapter 4 is what Abraham *discovered* — and part of what he discovered was that he could not deliver God’s promise himself. The child by Sarah’s handmaiden was a legal workaround, God being helped along with his own promises.

► 1:25:20

“For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’”

ROMANS 4:2–3 ↗

Note the sequence Paul is so careful about: this is before circumcision, before Isaac. What God calls both audiences to is faith, which by definition is not a work. Not a denigration of the Jewish believers, not a scolding of the Gentile ones — every culture that belongs to God can worship him in its own distinct way.

In Adam

► 1:26:25

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—”

ROMANS 5:12 ↗

Death, Matt pointed out, is not an abstraction in the verses that follow; it is personified, a ruler reigning from Adam to Moses even over those who did not sin the way Adam did. Sinai did not change Adam’s predicament — it sharpened the seriousness and the clarity of sin, while the phenomenon of death simply continued. That predicament is the shared backstory of Jew and Gentile alike.

► 1:28:31

He wanted the Eden story told properly. What God prevents is corruption made immortal — “lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life”, a sentence God does not even finish. They are put out of the garden, not out of his presence; God is not trapped in the garden, and he is still speaking to people outside it — even to Cain, who complains of being driven from it. What was lost was access to the tree. Which is why Bible nerds call the list that follows the genealogy of death: so-and-so lived, and had sons, *and he died*. And he died. And he died. Originally they did not need to. The single exception is a whisper of the gospel — Enoch, who walked with God, and was not.

► 1:30:19

“Death spread to all men because all sinned” strikes most of us as unfair. Matt argued we should embrace it rather than protest it, and reached for the strangest supporting text in the New Testament: Levi paid tithes through Abraham, because he was still in his ancestor’s loins. Not indirectly — directly. So Paul’s point is not that Adam’s sin trickled downstream to us, or that our sins merely resemble his. In Adam, we sinned. And you want that to be unfair, because the logic is about to be inverted.

Shall we sin, then?

► 1:32:08

You are included in Christ the same way — and not in his death only, but in his resurrection, and in his whole cradle-to-grave life of perfect obedience to the Father. Which makes the next question the sane one to ask. If his entire obedient life can be mine, so that I stand before the Father not merely neutral but righteous, why not sin all I want and give God more occasion to be gracious? “It’s supposed to be

scandalous,” Matt said. “It is scandalous. It’s genuinely shocking.” If Paul’s Adam argument does not provoke that question in you, you have not yet heard it.

► 1:33:38

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

ROMANS 6:3–4 ↗

“We are baptized into the whole person of Jesus, of which his death is a part,” Matt said, and then offered an analogy he flagged himself as possibly too cringey: Jesus is a Trojan horse of heaven, and scummy pirate weirdos like us get hidden inside him.

Why the answer is a person and not a moral argument

► 1:35:30

“Died to sin” in verse 2 does not mean what the modern phrase *dead to me* means — I turned over a new leaf, I stopped doing that. Verses 2 and 4 interact: it is *his* death we were buried into. So Paul answers a practical question about behavior with Christology, and Matt called that good pastoral care, because dead-works religion does not help anyway. Yes, sin is wrong, and that is a real reason to avoid it. But people already know it is wrong while they are doing it. Socrates thought the human problem was ignorance — explain to someone why the right thing is better and naturally they will do it. The room’s laughter answered that. “Don’t do crimes, they’re illegal” is not the gospel.

► 1:37:05

Instead: united with him in a death like his, therefore united with him in a resurrection like his — our old self crucified so that we would no longer be enslaved. The same move appears in Galatians 3, where the law is a guardian until Christ comes and all who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ — which is precisely why there is neither Jew nor Greek. Not a new mindset, not twelve steps, not the same old approach to God through our works but this time with glitter. “You can’t à la carte what you want from Jesus,” Matt said. And the freedom that results is not freedom in name only: whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

► 1:40:14

“We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

ROMANS 6:9–11 ↗

Paul’s discussion about us is really a discussion about Jesus, and it starts there. The core fact for a Christian is not what happened at your baptism but what happened at his. Matt said he asks believers who are struggling with their identity three questions: did he die adequately? Did he live a life of perfect obedience properly? Was the resurrection legit? It hangs on him.

What about Monday

► 1:42:58

Because people want the rubber to meet the road, Paul gives it — but only after all of that: do not let sin reign, do not present your members to sin, present yourselves to God as those brought from death to life. Presenting is a willing act. And it is addressed to Jewish and Gentile believers together, both under grace, because there are not two programs of salvation. There is one person.

► 1:46:28

Then the honest objection: if I am free from sin’s power, why do I still sin? More on that next week, he said — though he did mention the last person who told him, unflinching, that he no longer sins, and that Matt’s first question was whether he was married. What changed for us is not primarily an era but a Lord. We were transferred out of Adam and into Christ, and we are under his care as disciples.

► 1:47:27

So why does God use processes instead of zapping us complete? Matt inferred rather than asserted: why do trees take forever, why do babies take forever, why are they helpless for twenty years after that? “He actually wants a relationship with you. He wants to grow you like a father to a child. He’s not just bringing your file up to date in some weird IRS heaven thing.” That was the point all along — that he would be our God, and we his people, and he would dwell in our midst.

Why exert yourself at all

► 1:48:27

If the righteousness is entirely his and the seat at the table is already yours, why go back to level one of a game you have already beaten? Here Matt reached for something easy to overlook: not every Old

Testament sacrifice is a sin sacrifice. What Abel brought was an honor offering, not an apology — not flowers because I did something wrong, but I want to honor you, I am giving you of myself. When Solomon dedicated the temple he piled up a fortune and set it on fire. So when Paul says to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, he does not mean keep attempting what Christ has already finished.

► 1:50:22

“That is the exact kind of question you might ask if you’ve never met him,” Matt said. If you belong to him and know him and love him, the question loses its sting. Paul is even careful about how he frames the slavery language he uses in verse 19 — “I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations” — because the obedience he is describing is the free obedience of already-free people.

Wages and gift

► 1:52:15

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

ROMANS 6:22–23 ↗

► 1:53:10

Matt traced how carefully Paul earns that famous sentence. There is the way that seems right to a man, whose end is death. There is Ananias and Sapphira — an example, he conceded, that is not especially encouraging. Romans 1, the awkward opening sermon of this series where he read every verse and rather sucked the energy out of the room, catalogs sins that carried the death penalty. Romans 2 describes people seeking glory and honor and immortality and failing to find it. **Romans 3** and 4 put Jew and Gentile in the same bucket, and Romans 5 has death reigning since Adam. The wages of sin is death. Paul could not have made it clearer.

► 1:54:29

And the answer to those who seek honor and immortality is not another attempt at the glory of God with new tools. It is the person of Jesus, offered to every tribe and language and people, whose destiny is inclusion in the bride of Christ. We are freed ones. So why submit to sin deliberately? It is still frustrating, because we fail, and Jesus taught us to pray not to be led into temptation but delivered from evil. But the process is part of the goal. He wants a real discipleship relationship — and the why, the how and the what are all rooted in who Jesus is.

How he ended it

► 1:56:58

Matt confessed he does not know how to end sermons, and proposed a new habit: rather than waiting until after lunch when we will have forgotten, ask the Lord now what he would have you do with this. Then, after the prayer, he came back with one more text, because Paul was only echoing Jesus — “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin; if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed. “So you are free in Christ indeed. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Romans 1:5
- 1 Corinthians 2:2
- Philippians 3:8
- John 10:27
- Romans 4:2–3
- Romans 5:12
- Genesis 3:22–24
- Genesis 4:14
- Genesis 5:24
- Hebrews 7:9–10
- Romans 6:1
- Romans 6:3–4
- Romans 6:5–7
- Galatians 3:23–27
- John 8:36
- Romans 6:9–11
- Romans 6:12–14
- Genesis 4:3–5
- 1 Kings 8:63
- Romans 12:1
- Romans 6:19
- Romans 6:22–23
- Proverbs 14:12
- Acts 5:1–11
- Romans 2:7
- Matthew 6:13
- John 8:31–32

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. The Roman church was arguing over whose way of following Jesus counted. Where do you catch yourself measuring other believers by a standard Paul would not have used?
2. Abraham's workaround with Hagar was an attempt to help God keep his own promise. What promise are you currently trying to fulfill on God's behalf?
3. Matt said "in Adam we sinned" should be embraced rather than protested, because the same logic puts us in Christ. What resists that in you?
4. Paul answers a behavior question with Jesus' identity rather than a moral argument. When you fight sin, which of those two are you actually reaching for?
5. Abel's offering was honor, not apology. What would one honor offering — of time, money or effort — look like from you 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=5upWQKTVit4&t=4694s>

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.