Social Capital

Spending your good name for Christ, and dropping the burdens nobody should carry

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, May 24, 2020
PASSAGES	Proverbs 22:1; Proverbs 3:9; Matthew 16:26; Matthew 6:24; Ephesians 2:2; Matthew 13:44; 2 Corinthians 2:15-16; Esther 4:14
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:10:54 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Scripture calls a good name better than great riches. Our relationships, trust and influence are social capital, and like money they are meant to honor God, not be hoarded. Speaking of Christ will sometimes cost us some of it. That is not failure: Christ is our judge and our audience of one, and the mission rests on his shoulders, not ours.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The social treasures we accumulate – trust, respect, influence – are the most precious earthly riches, and should be spent for God rather than stockpiled.
- You cannot serve both God and people's approval. Any proclamation of Christ as sovereign will cost some social capital.
- Many kind evangelicals are stuck in an "error code": they want people to know Jesus, but fear that upsetting anyone means being unloving.
- "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" is often wise, but it is not a rule. Prophets, apostles and Jesus spoke to strangers and opponents.
- As Christ is fully God and fully man, and God is wholly loving and wholly just, we can be both kind and truthful at once.
- No matter what you stand for, someone will not like it. The aroma of Christ smells different to different people.

- If you falter, God's purposes do not fail. Christ is competent, and his yoke is easy.

▶ 1:10:54

Matt opened a two-week look at outreach by admitting it is not many people's favorite subject – largely because of how it has been handed to us, with burdens he did not think appropriate. He wanted to use his role as outreach pastor to lift some man-made regulations off people, and to point them back to Christ, who is competent and truly the Shepherd of the flock.

Not a pyramid scheme

▶ 1:12:01

"If Satan and his angels cannot thwart his plans, neither can you through your failures or your fears." The church is not "a man-powered pyramid scheme that only exists insofar as we are strong enough to perpetuate it." It has always been built on the solid rock of God himself. That would be the theme of the following week. This week Matt wanted to run something like a virus scan on our ideas about outreach, because the world has its behavior police and so, sometimes, does the church.

A good name

▶ 1:13:08

> "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold."
>
> PROVERBS 22:1 ↗

Of all earthly riches, Matt said, this verse suggests the most precious are social ones. He called them social capital: "the relationships that we have, the amount that people trust us, the amount of influence we have, the amount that we've earned their respect through relational investment." We should not hoard money with no intention of spending it on anything but ourselves, and the same goes for this. "Honor the Lord with your wealth" – if that applies to dollar bills, how much more to our social wealth.

▶ 1:15:22

> "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"
>
> MATTHEW 16:26 ↗

Gain the whole world's attention and admiration and lose yourself, and what was it worth?

> "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."
>
> MATTHEW 6:24 ↗

▶ 1:16:35

Nor, Matt argued, can you serve both God and being liked. It feels good to be popular and it hurts to lose it. And evangelicals have a spiritual reason to hoard approval: we want people to like us so they will see Christ in us. So losing social capital hurts personally and feels like it jeopardizes the mission. But his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30), and many tender-hearted believers have shouldered the evangelization of the world in a way Matt thought inappropriate.

How you spend it

▶ 1:17:47

Speaking the truth when it is unpopular – about anything – spends social capital. You may hurt feelings, and you may get it back with interest from people who respect your honesty, or you may lose relationships. The same goes for spiritual things. If the secular world had a creed, Matt suggested, it would be "you be you, don't be evil," and maybe "love is everything," with love left vague. The exclusive lordship of Christ cuts against all three. Paul describes the world as following "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2) – an atmospheric resistance to Christ's lordship. Any proclamation of him as sovereign will cost something.

▶ 1:20:07

That matters more as the church moves its message online. And in Matt's experience the caricature of evangelicals as mean-spirited is mostly untrue. He knows many kind believers who love their neighbors and badly want them to know Christ, but hit "an error code": they want to talk about Jesus, they do not want to hurt anyone, and hurting someone feels unkind, and unkind feels unloving. Well-meant advice from people like him, he admitted, often adds weight instead of lifting it.

Niceness

▶ 1:21:52

Churchy people tend to be cooperative and sweet, exactly the kind who absorb rules without complaining. One such rule: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." There is truth in it, and we should approach the world in caring friendship. But it does not always have to come first. Scripture is full of prophets, priests, kings, apostles and Jesus himself speaking about God to strangers or to people hostile to them.

▶ 1:23:30

Love is kind – that is biblical. But if you also believe that kindness never upsets anyone, you have a problem. If someone is upset, please do not let it be because you were mean. But believing that any preaching that upsets people is an error is believing something false. Paul once preached in a city that ended up chanting in the streets for hours until soldiers stepped in, and Matt did not think Paul was mean-spirited. Christ was perfect, and he irritated people. "You may as well just accept it."

▶ 1:25:00

A related idea: love is affirming, and disagreement is not, so anything confrontational is off the menu – leaving you to try to "nice somebody into the kingdom." Matt answered with Christology. Jesus is not God when walking on water and man when eating fish; he is God made man in everything. In the same way God is not loving one moment and just the next. "Everything God does is loving, because he is love. Everything God does is just, because he's the metric for what justice is." So we need not oscillate between being sweet one day and speaking the truth "like a maniac" the next.

An audience of one

▶ 1:26:56

Some church people want you out with a sign; others want you gentle and tender. Instead of pleasing groups, please one person: Jesus Christ, "your judge, your Shepherd, your comforter, your encourager and your teacher." If people admire you for following him, good. If they falsely accuse you because of him, that is not necessarily your fault. "Be kind is a good idea. Speak the truth is a good idea. Ultimately, though, I want to follow the person of Jesus Christ, not a series of ideas."

▶ 1:28:05

Whatever you stand for, someone will mock it – even if you stand for nothing, or walk around with a sign that says "Trees go bark." Have you been on the internet? "You will experience what I refer to as disagreement. It's okay." Following Christ need not be grim, either. The man who found treasure in a

field (Matthew 13:44) was secretly giddy as he went to sell everything. We can follow eagerly and joyfully – and it may still bother some people.

▶ 1:30:51

Some counterpoints. Affirming death when life is still an option is not necessarily loving. And Christ and the apostles were kind, yet spoke truth to strangers without remorse. Matt pitched a comedy sketch of Pentecost done the modern way – Peter rising to say, "Honestly, who knows what this is? What's your vibe? Tell me about yourself" – when in fact he told people he had never met exactly what God was doing. Jesus asked a woman at a well for water and quickly offered her living water, then sent her back to a town where her standing was poor. Stephen preached a beautiful sermon to the Sanhedrin, and they stoned him.

▶ 1:33:09

Believing you are not loving until the world says you are is "a dead-end road" and heavy emotional leverage. The real metric: Christ is our judge and our target audience. He wants us loving and clear, and he will lead us into moments where the right response is friendship, and moments where we get to witness, however imperfectly. Paul says the aroma of Christ is "a fragrance from death to death" to some and "from life to life" to others (2 Corinthians 2:15–16). To think you must nail it every time, so that everyone finds it pleasant, "is torturously heavy." It is also a strategic error: gentle people with plenty of social capital leave witness to "the most aggressive people, like me."

Some cringe-worthy stories

▶ 1:35:56

In high school Matt wanted to win souls but was, by his own account, a total wuss – sweating through conversations and barely listening. So he ironed "I love Jesus" onto a T-shirt from Michael's, mainly to force himself to be brave. At UT he prayed for two classmates in geometry all semester, never spoke to them, and finally handed them a letter on the last day. They said thanks.

▶ 1:37:30

He also prayed for a sharp student in the front row of his physics class. Months later, at the free-speech boards during Easter week, he finally walked up, fumbling through small talk – and the student asked, "Hey Matt, have you trusted Christ as your Savior yet?" "Wait, stop, that was my line." They had been circling each other all semester.

▶ 1:39:30

More recently, a man at a gas station launched straight into a pitch to clean Matt's cloudy headlights. If he could do a spiel, Matt thought, so could he: "Do you know God? Do you pray?" The man's question was whether prayer works, and Matt, borrowing from sermons he had heard at Hope, said it is not

magic – God works, and we appeal to him. The man liked that. He is still in Matt's phone as "Tony Headlight."

▶ 1:40:54

As an algebra teacher he left a book by a Catholic priest about exorcisms tilted on the corner of his desk where a goth student would see it, until one day the student picked it up and borrowed it. Cringey? Maybe. A rule to copy? No. "I want you to follow Christ. You don't have to copy some preacher guy's rules." And you never know: a student who seemed to hate his strict class – who had nearly thrown a chair – came to his room the next year in a crisis and said, "I loved you, Mr. Ryniker."

If you falter, he won't fail

▶ 1:43:27

Matt suggested making a list of the evangelistic encounters of Jesus and the apostles: they were loving, some people loved it and some hated it. One of his favorite verses is Mordecai's word to Esther: if you keep silent, deliverance will rise from another place (Esther 4:14). "If I fail, it's not that the ultimate plans of God have failed. It's just that I failed." He can stomach that far better than the idea that God's purposes for the nations rest on him not faltering.

▶ 1:45:09

"Christ is competent. He's not a fool." The worldwide mission rests on someone who can actually bear it – alive, awake, alert. Perhaps you are where you are for such a time as this, but if you falter, he will not fail. Matt asked everyone to pray about where they have social capital and where they might spend it, and prayed that Hope would have grace to see where it had burdened itself with lies, and to follow the Good Shepherd's yoke with joy.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Proverbs 22:1
- Proverbs 3:9
- Matthew 16:26
- Matthew 6:24
- Matthew 11:30
- Ephesians 2:2
- Matthew 13:44
- 2 Corinthians 2:15–16
- Esther 4:14

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where do you have social capital – trust, respect, influence – and how are you tempted to hoard it?
2. Matt described an “error code” between wanting people to know Jesus and not wanting to upset anyone. When have you felt that conflict?
3. How does the idea that God is wholly loving and wholly just change the way you think about kindness and truth?
4. What would it look like to treat Christ, not any group of people, as your audience of one?
5. If the mission rests on Christ’s shoulders and not yours, what step might you take this week that fear has kept you from?

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=KxAZEFFvfmo&t=4254s

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.