Hope Chapel Easter Sunday 2021

A Trinitarian meditation on the cross and the empty tomb – and a divine blood transfusion

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, April 4, 2021
PASSAGES	Psalm 22; Hebrews 9:13-14; Romans 6:4-6; Romans 1:3-4; Acts 2:29-32; John 10:17-18; Romans 5:5-8; 2 Peter 1:4; Leviticus 17:11
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:54:38 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Easter is not primarily about us getting a fresh start. It is an act of the triune God: the Son offering himself through the Spirit to the Father, and the Father raising him by the Spirit of holiness to declare him the rightful King. Only then do we look at ourselves – co-crucified with him, freed from sin and the law, and animated by the very life of God.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Easter is not an emotional reboot, a legal file being shredded, or a metaphor about spring. God the Son actually died and was actually raised, and he includes us in it.
- Religion's false song says we finally broke through to a reluctant God. The truth is we were running from God and he has been pursuing us all along.
- What Jesus suffered for us was death itself, not only pain. "God forbid we believe that his death is an afterthought."
- Like David in Psalm 22, Jesus was abandoned circumstantially – there was no rescue – but not relationally. The Father was in Christ reconciling the world.
- The cross does not change the Father's heart toward us; it demonstrates it. All three persons of the Trinity were in on it.
- We cannot crucify our old self; we were crucified with him. The only way out from under sin, death and the law is a death God gives us in his.

- Our feelings do not define reality. Forgiven, co-crucified and alive by the Spirit, we stop looking at ourselves and behold a God who is anything but boring.

▶ 0:54:38

Rain had soaked the outdoor service – "just in case I got rained out of my first sermon, which is fine, I don't end my sermons well anyway" – so Matt began indoors by honoring two women: the leader of the playground renovation, for the hard work of thinking it through, and Lisette Espinosa, whose note on COVID protocols for the women's retreat "had the spirit of Christ on it." Husbands, brothers and fathers, he said, should sign the women up and pay for it.

What Easter is not

▶ 0:57:51

It is not getting emotionally hyped for another year or turning over a new leaf. "I would say Easter is not even primarily about us at all." Matt wanted a deliberate meditation on the crucifixion and resurrection as acts of God – a picture of the Trinity itself – before turning to what they mean for believers.

▶ 0:58:29

Nor is it merely a legal decision, where a heavenly court throws out your rap sheet and you stay the same. And it is not theater or metaphor, like flowers and baby birds in spring. "We're talking about Jesus, who is God the Son, actually dying, not metaphorically dying, and actually being raised from the dead – actually including us in on that too."

Who died for us

▶ 0:59:42

There is a false song of religion, Matt said, that we have been pursuing God all this time and finally got our guy through the "passive-aggressive brass ceiling" between us and heaven. "Truth is that all along we've been the ones running from God, and he's been the one pursuing." Jesus is a perfect man, but the gift is profound because he is God made flesh: "I and the Father are one."

▶ 1:00:45

The Nicene Creed calls him “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.” Not mostly God, not God Monday to Thursday and up in the air on Sunday. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

What he suffered

▶ 1:01:20

Was it the pain, the anguish, the abandonment by his followers? Scripture is precise. Christ suffered once for sins, “being put to death in the flesh” (1 Peter 3:18); he reconciled us “in his body of flesh by his death” (Colossians 1:22); he is crowned with glory “because of the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9).

▶ 1:02:24

Newcomers might understandably think Christians believe the torture paid for our sins. There was real pain, “but God forbid we believe that his death is an afterthought. It’s actually the central ingredient. The thing he did for us was die.”

Where was the Spirit, and where was the Father?

▶ 1:02:59

There is a hot debate in books and podcasts about whether the Father abandoned the Son. What Matt noticed missing from almost all of it was the Spirit. “We don’t worship a binity… but a Trinity.” The Spirit was present at the cross: the Son offered himself to the Father through the Spirit, as Hebrews 9 says. So what was the Father doing?

▶ 1:04:35

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Matt distinguished relational, emotional abandonment from circumstantial, physical abandonment – a distinction David himself draws in the psalm Jesus quoted. Suffocating on the cross, Jesus could not recite it all, but his hearers knew how it ran.

▶ 1:05:58

> “Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help… I am poured out like water… they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. But you, O Lord, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid!… For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.”
>
> PSALM 22:11–24 ↗

▶ 1:07:03

David knew God had not abandoned him relationally – "you made me trust you at my mother's breasts" – but there was no rescue yet from people literally trying to kill him. David lived to tell the tale. For Jesus there was no rescue plan; he was left to die.

▶ 1:08:08

Matt apologised in advance for the analogy: a *MADtv* sketch in which a Terminator is sent back to protect Jesus and keeps shooting Judas, while Jesus keeps raising Judas and telling the robot to stop. It was funny because Jesus was trying to die. For the Father to step in and stop it "would be out of step with what the Son and the Spirit are doing. So of course he's abandoning him to death. That's precisely the thing the Son is trying to do."

▶ 1:09:16

But that does not mean the Father hid his face. Jesus told his disciples they would scatter, "yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (John 16:32). And Paul says
God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. When Isaiah says it pleased the Lord to crush him, it is because in those crushings the nations are purchased – the end of Psalm 22, where "all the families of the nations shall worship before you."

▶ 1:10:53

> "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."
>
> HEBREWS 9:13–14 ↗

▶ 1:11:38

Every Old Testament sacrifice that was a pleasing aroma to the Lord foreshadowed this, and the fulfilment pleased him:

> "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."
>
> JOHN 10:17–18 ↗ (NIV)

▶ 1:12:45

> *"The crucifixion doesn't change the Father's heart towards us. It demonstrates it."*

Jesus was not twisting the Father's arm so that he would love us, and he was not saving us from the Father but from sin and death.

The resurrection: the Father honors the Son

▶ 1:13:29

The resurrection is also first an act of God, the persons of the Trinity showing love and honor to one another. At Pentecost Peter calls David a prophet who knew God had sworn to set a descendant on his throne, and "foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:29–32).

▶ 1:15:07

Building on Steve's Palm Sunday message, Matt retold the backstory from 1 Kings 1: while David lay weak, Adonijah – the eldest, handsome, with men hired to proclaim him king – drew a following. David had Solomon set on his own royal mule and paraded, and the people received him as the rightful son of David. When Jesus rode in on a donkey and was received, he was recognised as the rightful King – and he will come again, on a white horse, establishing it beyond doubt. In between, "we killed him, and the Father took that as an opportunity to resurrect him from the dead and demonstrate his loyalty to the Son."

▶ 1:16:41

> "...concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."
>
> ROMANS 1:3–4 ↗

The Son had authority to take up his life, yet he committed himself into the Father's hands; the Father, through the Spirit of holiness, raised him and declared him Son of God. "Let's just pause for a moment and not think about us... and behold this Lord of glory."

What it means for us

▶ 1:19:02

Even how it affects us shines light on God, because the life and forgiveness it opens is "a demonstration of his love and a way for us to brag about him." Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit; "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:5–8).

▶ 1:19:36

"Our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing" (Romans 6:6). Matt pushed back on whole cottage industries of steps to mortify the flesh. Paul said to put to death the deeds of the body; the flesh itself was mortified by God's own death, "something you can't recreate." We were crucified with him – "two hands, one nail."

▶ 1:20:51

So we are released from the law to serve "in the new way of the Spirit" (Romans 7:6), and "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1–4). Boring theology? Paul did not think so: if Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins.

▶ 1:22:39

But how are we free from the law, when Jesus said not an iota will pass from it (Matthew 5:18)? God did not change his mind or destroy it. "You died. There's no other way around it."

▶ 1:23:14

> "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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."
>
> ROMANS 6:4–5 ↗

▶ 1:24:21

As the Son committed himself to the Father and was raised, we can entrust ourselves fully to him and be baptized into his death – without first understanding all the implications.

A divine blood transfusion

▶ 1:24:57

This is far more than a closed legal book. In Leviticus 17:11 the life of a creature is in its blood, given for atonement. John the Baptist saw Jesus and said,
"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

▶ 1:26:14

"If the life of a creature is in its blood, and God made flesh sheds his blood for you, what was given to us? It's kind of scandalous to say – but the very life of God." As Adam was dust animated by God's breath, those baptized into Jesus' death "receive a divine blood transfusion, giving us life from the dead." Hence Peter: we become partakers of the divine nature.

▶ 1:27:06

"You're not a knick-knack meant to be looked at in the halls of heaven. You are an adopted child, and you are animated not by your own efforts but by the very lifeblood of God himself." You may feel you belong nowhere here, but "you are truly a child of God."

When we don't feel it

▶ 1:29:22

Some will say they don't feel set free or animated by the life of God. "When did we get so existential – that we feel like our feelings define reality?" God is in the room whether you feel him or not. "You are forgiven and co-crucified. We can receive it on faith." You did not make it happen and could not have stopped it.

▶ 1:30:50

So we should reject as unchristian both "I don't feel forgiven, so I'm not" and the idea that we are the same before and after Christ – "having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5). We are born of the Spirit and walk in newness of life – but there is nothing to brag about, because God did it.

▶ 1:31:30

"I think that's one of the reasons why a lot of us get bored with our faith – because we keep looking at ourselves... You know what's not boring? God." We are a two-volt bulb beside a billion-volt God who wants to show us his love.

God is all in

▶ 1:32:13

In summary: Jesus is truly God, offering himself through the Spirit to the Father, who did not abandon him to Hades but raised him by his glory and the Spirit of holiness, declaring him Son of God – satisfying the demand of death and our deep longing for life.

▶ 1:32:56

> *"When Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God, that's God saying I'm all in. When Jesus gave up his life willingly, that's God saying I'm all in. And when Jesus conquered death, that's God saying I'm not turning back."*

▶ 1:33:24

"There is now forever a person in the Trinity who is God made human. That is how committed God is to our people." So this does not fit "five steps to improve my life this week." The shift is away from ourselves to beholding his glory and longing for his return and the communion with him the Spirit has already begun.

▶ 1:34:02

Until then, "we proclaim he is risen and he is returning." Matt's blessing asked that we fix our eyes on him, be transformed by his glory, and that the Spirit would illuminate our hearts "to see what you're like."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- John 10:30
- John 14:9
- 1 Peter 3:18
- Colossians 1:22
- Hebrews 2:9
- Psalm 22:11–24
- John 16:32
- 2 Corinthians 5:19
- Isaiah 53:10
- Hebrews 9:13–14
- John 10:17–18 (NIV)
- Acts 2:29–32
- 1 Kings 1:32–40
- Romans 1:3–4
- Romans 5:5–8
- Romans 6:6
- Romans 8:13
- Romans 7:6
- Romans 8:1–4
- 1 Corinthians 15:17
- Matthew 5:18
- Romans 6:4–5
- Leviticus 17:11
- John 1:29
- 2 Peter 1:4
- 2 Timothy 3:5

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said Easter is “not even primarily about us.” What changes when you start with what the Father, Son and Spirit were doing rather than with what you received?
2. How does the difference between circumstantial and relational abandonment in Psalm 22 help you read Jesus’ cry from the cross – or your own seasons of unanswered prayer?
3. “The crucifixion doesn’t change the Father’s heart towards us; it demonstrates it.” Where have you pictured God as a reluctant Father who had to be persuaded?
4. What is the difference between trying to mortify the flesh yourself and believing you were crucified with Christ? How might that change the way you fight a particular sin?
5. Matt warned against letting feelings define reality. What would it look like this week to receive on faith that you are forgiven and a child of God, and to fix your eyes on him?

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=7twwRnzAoVM&t=3278s

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.