

Matt's Vision and Interview with Geno

A notebook of vision, a church that doesn't need steadying, and a Q&A with the outgoing pastor

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, August 1, 2021
PASSAGES	Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:23-24; Acts 17:24-25; Luke 18:8; 2 Samuel 6:6-7; Romans 9:5; John 20:27-28; John 5:39-40
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:58:03 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Hope Chapel's calling is to be a breath of fresh air – serious about God, not uptight about ourselves – devoted to worship, prayer and the apostles' teaching. Matt committed to preaching Jesus as the Scriptures present him rather than a tamer Jesus adapted to the age, because God does not need our help to keep his church alive, and our hope is the King who reigns now and is coming again.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Some of Hope's best traits are "first nature": people clean up without being asked, and during the uncertainty of COVID the church gave more, not less.
- ◆ Matt calls Hope "conservative Pentecausal": convinced the biblical events really happened, open to the Spirit's gifts with a light touch, and casual enough that anxiety about ourselves does not crowd out God.
- ◆ That breath of fresh air is not just a vibe from the past but a calling – including worship and prayer as a focus, not a list of songs.
- ◆ Reworking Christianity to keep it respectable is like Uzzah steadying the ark. God does not need our help; anxious tampering with the message is a form of unbelief.

- ◆ The church devoted itself to the apostles' teaching because Jesus deliberately entrusted the authoritative account of himself to them, Paul included.
- ◆ Jesus is not only an example of faith but its object: God over all, "my Lord and my God."
- ◆ Our hope is not merely to survive as Christians until we die, but the return of Jesus to establish his kingdom.

► 0:58:03

Matt, still Hope's associate pastor "for now," had been asked by the board to share his vision – a week late, because he had been sick. First, the order of events: Geno's celebration would come on October 3, after a successor was in place, because "it would be hard for Geno to be celebrated and to feel celebrated while he was still carrying a lot of the burden of the church."

A notebook with tabs

► 0:59:25

He felt no pressure to say everything and no anxiety. For years, suspecting from things Geno said that retirement was coming, Matt had written down whatever seemed wise in a conversation or whatever he felt God put on his heart – in a notebook with subdividers – so that if the board hired him, he wouldn't have to say, "Lord, will you tell me about everything now?"

► 1:00:43

One tab held the DNA and callings of Hope Chapel, which he joined in 2004 – including things the church may not know it does well "because it's first nature."

► 1:01:24

He once hosted a potluck and forgot to arrange a cleanup crew. It didn't matter: "like ants," two families took the kitchen, others swept and stacked chairs. "It just happened." Hope is humble and giving, financially too: during the uncertainty of the pandemic, "Hope Chapel people gave more, not less... that doesn't make sense, but it doesn't have to make sense."

Conservative Pentecasualism

► 1:02:44

When people ask what kind of church Hope is, Matt says “we’re denominationally challenged.” His invented word for it: conservative Pentecasualism.

► 1:03:36

Conservative is theological, not political: when you read of the resurrection, you believe it happened. From the eighteenth century, scholars like Schleiermacher and von Harnack tried to adapt Christianity for the modern world by treating the Bible’s events not as history but as “maps for meaning... guides for truthiness,” making faith about value judgments rather than real events. Conservative theologians hold that the crucifixion and resurrection actually happened – “and this is the perspective of Hope Chapel’s preachers and will be going forward.”

► 1:04:47

Loyalty to Scripture inhibits no joy. “Hope Chapel has fun on purpose. Hope Chapel has fun on accident.” Some connect piety with severity; Hope does not, and playfulness is “like chlorine for pool water – it prevents the growth of certain funky things,” including a religious spirit.

► 1:05:32

Pentecasual: you need not worry what to do with your body or what to wear. That very morning communion was delayed because the congregation broke into praise, “and they’re like, okay, so we’re just going to wait, and that’s fine.” If you worry about clothes, “you’ll see your senior pastor wearing a turkey hat and you’ll think, this is fine.” Self-analysis is a bottomless pit; casualness keeps the focus on God. So Hope uses the charismatic gifts, “but not in a way that becomes a badge of honor... there’s a light-touch vibe where we take ourselves a lot less seriously and we take God a lot more seriously.”

A calling, not just a vibe

► 1:07:29

This DNA, Matt believes, is a calling God has put on the church, and for him it has felt like “a breath of fresh air.” Some call Hope a hospital for the weary – true for some, but limiting: Matt grew up happily at St. Luke’s Episcopal and arrived not worn out, “but the breath of fresh air, I still felt it.” “It would be my honor to defend that calling.”

► 1:09:15

That includes prayer and worship as a focus – “we are not running through a list of songs.” He loves watching Deb and Jack stop mid-song, start over, change key, laugh: “there’s no anxiety in it, because the focus is on God.” There are many ways to invest in that, “and I think that we absolutely must.”

God doesn't need steady

► 1:10:53

Those modernising theologians, Matt said, became antagonists to orthodoxy by accident; they wanted to protect Christianity from ridicule by keeping its respectable parts and excising what they didn't like. That temptation isn't only theirs. They remind him of Uzzah, struck dead when he reached out to steady the ark (2 Samuel 6:6–7). “God doesn't need our help to stabilize.”

► 1:12:11

“There's nothing more liberating than reminding myself and others that I am literally unnecessary.”

► 1:12:54

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”

ACTS 17:24–25 ↗

God never ate the Old Testament sacrifices. “Jesus never has to hide behind me or my talents.”

► 1:14:15

Jesus asked, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” “Anxiety-produced tampering with the message of Christianity so that people will accept it is contrary to faith and shows unbelief.” Whatever Jesus finds him doing, Matt wants to be found trusting that Jesus is as competent and powerful as he says.

► 1:14:54

That is why he taught Judges: “a great joy of mine to convey the incompetence of mankind. Christianity has never depended on competent leaders.” He committed, as senior pastor, to remain faithful to his wife and family and to preach from Scripture – “but I will not accept all the hopes and dreams of everyone here,” partly because, like many leaders, he is incompetent. He still cannot find the garden shears he put away himself. “How are you gonna save Austin, pastor? Funny you should bring that up. I'm not.”

The apostles' teaching

► 1:16:34

So Hope will hold to the whole counsel of God as far as possible, following the first church:

“they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Why the apostles’ teaching and not Jesus? “Because the authoritative teaching on Jesus comes from the apostles, because Jesus purposefully did that.”

► 1:17:50

Matt defends Paul so often because, for the modern church, “Paul the big meanie, mean pants” is often the first thing to go – too doctrinal, too strict on sexual ethics. But Jesus went out of his way to convert him, and Paul was trained in the life of Jesus:

► 1:18:32

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–24 ↗

► 1:19:13

“On the night he was betrayed” – Paul doesn’t explain who betrayed him, because the Corinthians knew the story, because Paul, who planted that church, had told them. The New Testament writers “had the authoritative scoop on Jesus,” which is why Matt never wants to indulge “the fantasy that I have a gut-level knowledge of Jesus so well that I don’t need the whole counsel of God.”

Not only an example, but the object of faith

► 1:19:37

“To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”

ROMANS 9:5 ↗

► 1:20:14

Thomas, told to put his fingers in the wounds, answered, “My Lord and my God!” The apostles saw him as he truly was – “Yahweh incarnate.”

► 1:20:58

“Jesus is not an example of faith only, but the object of faith... We don’t want to tell the world that we want to believe like Jesus believes. We believe in Jesus.” He did not just start a movement of good works and hand us the baton; he is God stepping into a dark world, offering his very self. So Matt committed to preach Jesus as the Scriptures show him, “not just a wonderful man, the finest flower of humanity.” It is the Lord’s job to keep his church alive; Matt’s is to be faithful.

► 1:22:15

If our calling is to worship and adore him, we must work hard to know him as he really is. Matt knows the Scriptures point to a person – you search the Scriptures thinking you have life in them, but they bear witness to me – yet that person revealed himself through his apostles, “and it would be arrogant for me to wander from the Scriptures because I’ve met him at least once.”

Loyalty will be tested

► 1:22:48

Not loyalty to Matt or to Hope, but every Christian’s loyalty to Jesus. His exclusive claims are a stumbling block; “you’ll be tempted to say that Jesus is my savior instead of saying the Savior.” The world dislikes the Bible’s high demands. “There’s nothing new under the sun. It’s been dark in the world for a long time. The faithful and the leaders of the faithful have been incompetent always. Our hope has always been in the one true God.”

► 1:24:57

So Hope should keep focusing on worship, prayer and devotion, with loyalty to him as he is. He is not “biting his fingernails on his throne wondering if we’re gonna take the world by storm for him.” “Just try to imagine what it would look like for God to be stressed out.”

► 1:25:54

Rehearse the past as you look ahead. A UT professor of ancient Roman culture told Matt that Romans spread rumors that Christians ate babies and held orgies. It went on to the burning of Scriptures and the murder of bishops and lay leaders. “But the existence of the church from one generation to the next has never depended on human strength, because the Lord of glory is on the throne.”

► 1:27:20

“Even though it’s the year 2021,” we will lift up the banner of the gospel, knowing we don’t have what it takes and will be ridiculed. “It’s an unworkable alternative to hide behind a tamer gospel of Jesus the good example.”

► 1:28:06

Last: “We long for the return of the Lord.” Our ultimate hope is not to make it long enough to raise Christian kids and “die kind of happy,” but Jesus, ruling now and coming again to establish his judgments, his kingdom and his peace. “It is looking forward to that that we do what we do.”

Geno’s questions

► 1:30:40

Geno, collecting questions from the congregation on cards, called the talk “brilliant” for tying Hope’s future to substantial theology. Was Matt anxious about anything? Only which pew to sit in, now that there seemed to be “some sort of senior pastor front-pew expectation.” Favorite color: green – apparently the correct answer.

► 1:33:07

How can we serve you? Matt told of his Fridays at a mosque, where the treasurer, Mustafa, always sought him out early. “If I was even remotely warm on becoming Muslim... that would have meant a lot.” Hope has many visitors: “If you’d show up just to talk to guests early, that would mean a lot to me.” “It may be one of the easiest outreaches ever,” Geno said – “they’re already in our building.” **His family?** “Pray for us.” He means to stay faithful to Mandy and the kids and not burn the candle at both ends.

► 1:37:57

Books? *Imagine Heaven*, finally finished in quarantine; a commentary on Hebrews by Edward Fudge; essays by J. Gresham Machen of old Princeton; and Edwin Friedman’s *Generation to Generation*, a gift from his brother, which argues that burnout comes less from how much you work than from how you relate to it emotionally.

► 1:40:50

That book is why he took up Krav Maga – a hobby with nothing to do with church. The bigger his investment in the gym, the smaller a share of his life Hope became, so work stress shrank too, and “divesting myself emotionally away from Hope Chapel actually helps me see Hope Chapel more clearly.” “So your solution for lowering your anxiety with work was to go get punched in the head?” “Ideally I will block.”

► 1:43:57

Reaching young people? “We have to stay clear in our messaging. When we lift up Christ, God draws, and there’s no other way to do it.” Hope does outreach best by opening lives and living rooms: start a small group, “leave a couch empty, and then as a group pray about who could sit on that couch.”

► 1:46:44

Avoiding the culture’s divisiveness? A seminary friend’s church imploded over social issues. Hope survived these years like a tree planted by a river – a reason to abide, not to boast. We bring the world’s divisions in with us, so stay single-minded on Jesus and talk honestly, without fear, one-on-one or in small groups. During the shutdown, people at his playground office hours poured out what they’d seen on the news; that invitation stands.

► 1:50:00

New directions? Office hours in Brentwood Neighborhood Park, maybe a neighborhood “conversation club” for lonely people. More YouTube: his summary of *The Communist Manifesto*, made because it is among the most assigned books at UT, has nearly 50,000 views. His atheist YouTuber neighbors even offered to help him build a studio, wanting better conversation partners – “we know you guys have angry weirdos, and we have angry weirdos.”

► 1:53:48

Whatever programs come, “we should think about Jesus as our very, very, very wealthy, well-connected friend. If there’s fruitfulness we want, we can ask, and then we can try to follow his lead.”

► 1:55:34

Geno announced Matt’s installation on the 29th, with Matt becoming senior pastor a month later. Matt said he hadn’t been sure he would apply, “but you kept saying it’s a good gig... if you can get it.” Geno prayed in thanks that Matt is “well grounded in his orthodoxy,” and that God would be glorified “evermore in and through Hope Chapel.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- [2 Samuel 6:6–7](#)
- [Acts 17:24–25](#)
- [Luke 18:8](#)
- [Acts 2:42](#)
- [1 Corinthians 11:23–24](#)
- [Romans 9:5](#)
- [John 20:27–28](#)
- [John 5:39–40](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt named things Hope does well “as first nature.” What have you seen in this church that it might not even realise it does well?
2. How would you describe “conservative Pentecostalism” to a friend, and which part of it has mattered most in your own walk with God?
3. Where are you tempted, like Uzzah, to steady God – reshaping the message or carrying anxiety as if Jesus needed your help?
4. What is the difference between believing like Jesus and believing in Jesus, and why does it matter for how we share our faith?
5. Matt asked the church to arrive early to welcome guests and to leave an empty couch in their small groups. Which of those will you try this month?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker joined Hope Chapel in 2004, grew up at St. Luke's Episcopal, and gave this vision as associate pastor shortly before becoming Hope's senior pastor. He described keeping a tabbed notebook of things he sensed God putting on his heart for the church, practising Krav Maga, and making YouTube videos on books assigned at UT. Outgoing senior pastor Geno Hildebrandt interviewed him with questions from the congregation.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzOzYFulspQ&t=3483s>

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.