Formed Out of the Clay

Made from dust, sent from the garden, and sought by a God who was never trapped inside it

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, September 5, 2021
PASSAGES	Genesis 2:7-3:24; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Timothy 6:15-16; Romans 16:20; Galatians 3:16; Romans 6:23; Job 33:6; Psalm 103:14; Psalm 139:13-15; Ecclesiastes 3:20; 2 Samuel 5:1; Genesis 29:14; Deuteronomy 1:37-39; Isaiah 7:15-16; Job 9:17
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:07:57 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God sent Adam and Eve out of Eden to keep them from the tree of life, not because he was locked inside the garden and done with them. The wages of sin is death, not divine passive aggression. The God who went looking for Adam with "Where are you?" comes looking for us in our worst moments — and in Christ, the last Adam, gives back the life the first Adam lost.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Knowing the Old Testament is a double victory: it is Scripture in its own right, and the New Testament keeps alluding to it, so without it we miss the argument.
- Every person is "formed out of the clay." Israel saw itself as dust animated by the breath of God, with no natural claim on living forever.
- "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is kinship language, not only marriage language. In Eden God invented family.
- Genesis says why Adam and Eve were banished: so they could not take from the tree of life and live forever. It never says God stayed behind in the garden.
- The wages of sin is death, not God going cold on you. In the garden God was the one doing the looking.

- Adam did something you could not stop, and you die; Christ did something you could not stop, and you live.
- The Spirit is given as a person, not a percentage. You are not on a treadmill earning God's nearness.

▶ 1:07:57

On Labor Day weekend Matt opened a series on Old Testament figures — not verse by verse, but "more of a tour of highlights," one person at a time, close enough together that the connections stay in memory.

Why the Old Testament, and why people

▶ 1:08:32

Knowing the Old Testament, Matt said, is "a double victory": it is already Scripture, and the New Testament refers to it so often that without it "we might even miss the argument of what the New Testament author is saying." A person is also a good place to stand and look at Jesus, by parallel or by contrast, and the stories point beyond him to what God still plans to do.

Formed from the ground

▶ 1:10:07

> "Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."
>
> GENESIS 2:7 ↗

A story like this answers some questions and not others, he cautioned; reading it well takes the patience to say "I don't know what I don't know" and attend to what it is actually telling us.

▶ 1:11:24

There is wordplay straight away: *adam* and *adamah*, man and ground, as *ish* and *ishah* will later link man and woman. And Israel heard itself in it. In Job 33:6, "I also am formed out of the clay." Ecclesiastes 3:20: all are from dust and to dust return. God "remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14), and Psalm 139:13–15 sets the womb in parallel with the depths of the earth. "We are all made from the ground because Adam was."

▶ 1:12:35

> "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'"
>
> GENESIS 2:15–17 ↗

God invents family

▶ 1:14:18

No suitable helper is found among the animals Adam names. God had formed everything else from the ground and could have done it again; instead he puts Adam to sleep and makes Eve from Adam himself. "When God creates," Matt said, "he does it not just in a way that's really efficient, but beautiful."

▶ 1:15:26

> "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.
>
> GENESIS 2:23–24 ↗

Matt used to hear "bone of my bones" as romance. But the tribes of Israel say it to David at Hebron (2 Samuel 5:1), and Laban says it to Jacob (Genesis 29:14). It means kin. The crown of creation is neither Adam alone nor Eve alone: "God has formed and created and invented family — something that's beautiful and God's idea."

Naked, crafty, and a threat left open

▶ 1:17:03

The couple are naked and unashamed; the serpent is more crafty than any creature. In Hebrew, *arom* and *arum* sound almost identical. Matt didn't claim to know what the pun means, only that "this narrative is well written — it's witty in subtle ways and it's playful in its details."

▶ 1:18:16

Then the threat of Genesis 2:17 — "dying you shall die." Matt laid out four readings: a spiritual death (which the text never defines, and which he could not trace before Origen in the third century); a metaphor; a literal death withheld in mercy; or a literal sentence commuted to a later date. His counsel was not to camp on any of them: "We could just watch what God does as the story resolves."

Knowing good and evil

▶ 1:20:03

Rather than build on a crafty serpent's words, Matt went to the few other places where knowledge, good and evil meet in one sentence. Israel's little ones, "who do not yet know good from bad," will enter the land (Deuteronomy 1:37–39); Isaiah 7:15–16 speaks of a child not yet able to refuse evil and choose good. That is partly why the Orthodox church pictures Adam and Eve as children, naked and unashamed the way small kids are at home. Matt offered it as an observation, not a conclusion — and noted that it is Paul, setting Adam beside Christ, who finally puts Adam at center stage.

"Where are you?"

▶ 1:22:39

They eat, sew fig leaves and hide. People often say Adam failed to lead; what we know for certain, Matt said, is that both failed to obey. Then:

> "But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'"
>
> GENESIS 3:9 ↗

▶ 1:23:07

God knows where Adam is. The question is a chance to confess — one Cain will be given in the next chapter and refuse. Treating Eden as a crime scene, Matt found both "persons of interest" surprisingly cooperative. Adam is often accused of shifting blame, but "it technically does seem to be what happened." Eve owns it too. The serpent gets no questions at all.

The crushed head and the crushed heel

▶ 1:24:45

> "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
>
> GENESIS 3:15 ↗

It is one verb both times — the same one Job uses: "he crushes me with a tempest" (Job 9:17). Crush a snake's head and it dies; let a deadly snake get your heel and you die. A crushing blow on both sides, like the rare fight where both boxers knock each other out at once.

▶ 1:26:24

The woman's seed is singular, and Paul reads Abraham's singular seed as Christ (Galatians 3:16). Then the plot twist: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20) — and the "your" is plural. "Y'all's feet." The crushing is the one seed's job, yet Paul expects it under the church's feet: "The many seeds of the woman, hidden inside that one mysterious, glorious seed, share his victory by his own crushing."

Why they were sent out

▶ 1:27:32

Adam names his wife Eve, "mother of all the living" — in the old Greek translation, simply *Zoe*, life. God clothes them in skins. Then:

> "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.
>
> GENESIS 3:22–24 ↗

▶ 1:29:14

So which reading of the threat was right? "I think that's irrelevant," Matt said. "What matters is that God acted, and we get to see what he does and his motivation." God gives the reason in the text: so they would not live forever.

God was never trapped in the garden

▶ 1:29:55

We tend to assume the banishment was from God's presence, "as though secretly or deep down we believe that God is trapped in the garden." But the story never shows Adam and Eve walking with God in the cool of the day. The one time God walks there, he is looking for Adam — and saying Sally walked past the grocery store at 3 p.m. does not mean she does it every day.

▶ 1:31:31

> *"Maybe we think the wages of sin is passive aggression. But the Bible says the wages of sin is death."*

(Romans 6:23.) Cut off from the tree of life, Adam, Eve and all their seed lose access to immortality.

▶ 1:32:06

Why labor it? Because of how we picture God when we fail: "We imagine that God is like, I'm so done with you ... that it's up to us to reclaim this relationship." But who was looking for whom? God's first words were not "I know what you did." They were "Where are you?" Outside the garden he goes on talking — to Cain, to Noah, to Abraham as a friend, to Moses face to face. "He, unlike we fear, is on the loose."

▶ 1:33:32

The idea that God cannot be around sinners is, Matt said, "a very unchristian idea." If Christ is Emmanuel, God with us, the "us" is sinners. "If God can't be in the presence of sin, Jesus was never friends with Peter."

In Adam all die, in Christ all live

▶ 1:34:18

Can any of us find the garden by good deeds, or praise our way past the cherubim? "It's hopeless without Christ, because only God is immortal."

> "...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal..."
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 6:15–16 ↗

Whoever lives forever in God's presence does so because God holds them together and gives it as a gift. "We have no right to claim that we are immortal."

▶ 1:36:11

> "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:22 ↗

All in Adam is humanity — even a good man like Noah. All in Christ are his children by faith. Could you have stopped the crucifixion? People tried to kill Jesus before his time and he walked through them. You could not have tripped Joseph of Arimathea, or Jesus on the way to the cross.

▶ 1:37:33

> *"Adam did something that was beyond your power to stop, and you die because of it. Christ did something beyond your power to stop, and you live because of it."*

Hence Paul: the first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. Each represents those who are in him.

Forward, not back to the garden

▶ 1:38:05

We idealize Adam and Eve's intimacy with God — Matt wasn't denying it, only noting the text never says so — while we already have what the story never gives them: the Spirit of God living in us, "a down payment of something even more wonderful that's coming."

▶ 1:39:16

So we don't look back. We look toward a new Jerusalem, "a sprawling metropolis full of people from all over the world, all different times, cultures and languages." That is the reason for the series: to watch God work across many generations on something he hasn't finished. "Our longing is not to be naked in some jungle. Our longing is to be in the new Jerusalem."

You are not on a treadmill

▶ 1:40:21

Matt blessed the church with "a knowledge of God's nearness," then added a last word. Some weeks we feel we earned the Spirit — readings done, prayers prayed, songs sung loud — as if God handed out percentages of himself. "Because of Christ's work, not ours, we were given the Spirit as a person, not a percentage."

▶ 1:41:40

Other weeks you have done the thing you swore off, for the fifteenth time, alone in your room in the dark, sure God won't see you until you go and find him. Matt called that a kind of idolatry, like Israel pointing at a calf and calling it the god who brought them out of Egypt: a god who lifts not one finger to find you when you are broken, only while you are "serving real hard on the treadmill."

▶ 1:42:38

> *"In that sad and broken place, before you even have the strength to go looking for him, he's already searching: Where are you? That's the God we serve."*

Not a God who shrugs at sin, Matt said, but one who cares and pursues "to preserve and promote relationship and justice." He prayed that God would help the church see him as he is, and break through and speak when they are broken.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Genesis 2:7
- Job 33:6
- Ecclesiastes 3:20
- Psalm 103:14
- Psalm 139:13–15
- Genesis 2:15–17
- Genesis 2:23–24
- 2 Samuel 5:1
- Genesis 29:14
- Genesis 2:17
- Deuteronomy 1:37–39
- Isaiah 7:15–16
- Genesis 3:9
- Genesis 3:15
- Job 9:17
- Galatians 3:16
- Romans 16:20
- Genesis 3:22–24
- Romans 6:23
- 1 Timothy 6:15–16
- 1 Corinthians 15:22
- 1 Corinthians 15:45

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt called knowing the Old Testament “a double victory.” Where has not knowing it left you missing what a New Testament writer was saying?
2. What changes when you hear “bone of my bones” as kinship language — that in Eden God invented family, not only marriage?
3. When you have failed, which picture of God do you tend to carry: the one trapped in the garden with his back turned, or the one who comes asking where you are?
4. How does it shape your sense of standing before God that Adam did something you could not stop, and Christ did too?
5. Where are you on the “treadmill” right now, and what would it look like this week to receive the Spirit as a person rather than a percentage you have to earn?

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=o-S00uE9mt8&t=4077s

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.