Jesus, Seeker and Saver (New Testament Figures)

Lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son, and a persecutor found

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, August 7, 2022
PASSAGES	Luke 15:1-24; Acts 9:1-22; Galatians 1:11-2:9; Luke 19:9-10; Acts 8:1-3; 2 Peter 3:15-16
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:05:36 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Many of us act as if Jesus started the church, tossed us the keys and now watches passively from heaven. But in his parables the shepherd, the woman and the father do all the seeking, and on the Damascus road Jesus himself went after the church's worst enemy. He is still the chief builder, the one most interested in saving the lost. That frees us from crushing pressure to serve him out of loyalty and joy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Our relationship to the apostles is shaped by our relationship to Christ. Claiming loyalty to Jesus while waving off his chosen witnesses is hollow.
- Jesus did not found the church and walk away. He is still building it.
- In the lost-and-found parables the protagonist is the seeker: the shepherd risks the ninety-nine, the woman burns costly oil, the father runs before the speech is made.
- We often expect Jesus to take us back as slaves; he is ready to welcome us as sons.
- No one evangelised Saul. Jesus sought him out personally and called him a chosen instrument.
- Paul's gospel came by revelation from Jesus, yet he humbly laid it before the apostles – and they added nothing.

- Jesus needs no one's permission to save. Our top priority is loyalty and adoration; sharing him is a privilege, not a whip.

▶ 1:05:36

On a communion Sunday, before his sermon, Matt explained that Good News Club – the after-school Bible club for elementary kids at Brentwood across the street – would restart under Rob and Janet Walker for grades K–2, and asked for one or two helpers. His old job there, he admitted, was getting everyone seated and quiet; he was "advertising something softer… maybe you could hand out snacks and be their hero." The congregation stood and prayed for the Walkers.

Not an absentee founder

▶ 1:09:39

Paul is this week's main character, but Jesus is again the focus. Matt recapped last week's warning about red-letter Christianity – obeying only the Gospels' red letters and disregarding Paul, Peter or James where they do not fit what you think Jesus was about. "It would be kind of arrogant for us to say, well, I know what Jesus would be like better than the people that hung out with him three years straight."

▶ 1:11:33

A second cartoon, again drawn by Phillip Latham: an eager man tells Jesus, "I'm with you all the way, I'll do whatever you command." Jesus says, "Perfect – just follow the instructions I left with these guys." He looks over at the apostles – "same old stuff… John again, Peter" – and says, "Nah." That is how fast loyalty can become obedience to a god of our own creation. Jesus wrote none of the Gospels, on purpose; "you can't get to him except through the people he put there on purpose."

▶ 1:14:21

But Jesus did not get the church going and then say, "I started the church for the first three issues, why don't y'all take the next two to three thousand… I'm going to be sitting down in heaven, just kind of passively watching. I did die for you, so it's the least you could do." Many of us serve that lord in our hearts, believing he tossed us the keys while walking away. The judges proved how untrustworthy people are, and the church age has not changed God's mind about who should be in charge.

Who does the seeking?

▶ 1:16:00

The Pharisees grumbled, "This man receives sinners and eats with them," so Jesus told three parables.

> "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing… 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'"
>
> LUKE 15:1–7 ↗

▶ 1:17:13

Matt read it again with the emphasis where he wanted it: *he* goes after it, *he* lays it on his shoulders, *he* rejoices. The protagonist is the shepherd, at great personal risk, leaving the others in the open. "I wonder who Jesus correlates to, and I wonder who we correlate to."

▶ 1:18:29

The woman with ten silver coins lights a lamp, sweeps the house and seeks diligently (Luke 15:8–10). The other coins do not find it. And there is urgency: the drachma was not worth nothing, but neither was the oil she was burning. Why not wait for free daylight? She wants it now. "Who do we correlate to? Other coins. It's kind of a boring role, sorry you didn't get the starring role."

▶ 1:20:26

The younger son squanders everything, ends up feeding pigs and longing for their food, and plans to hire himself out to his father. He rehearses a speech – we have all done that before a hard encounter: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."

▶ 1:21:48

> "And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."
>
> LUKE 15:11–24 ↗

▶ 1:22:20

"Hadn't done the speech yet. Still got embraced, still got kissed," by a father who had been looking and looking. The son had a contract mentality; the father was enthusiastic, merciful and longing. "That's often true for us. We think, well, at least Jesus will accept me as some slave thing." Three parables, one point: Jesus is not the great task-delegator but the great seeker and saviour of the lost. With Zacchaeus

he said it outright: “Today salvation has come to this house… For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:9–10).

The persecutor found

▶ 1:24:49

Stephen, the first recorded martyr, gave a great summary of the Old Testament – how God’s people had always been hard-hearted – “and then they stone him to death.” Saul approved, and while devout men mourned Stephen, Saul was ravaging the church, “entering house after house… dragging off men and women” to prison (Acts 8:1–3). Then, still breathing threats and murder, he sought letters to arrest followers of the Way in Damascus. “That guy. Would you be scared of that? I think we would have been the ones who would scatter.”

▶ 1:26:03

> “Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”
>
> ACTS 9:1–6 ↗

▶ 1:26:57

“Ah – that Lord. Well, this is awkward.” Blind, led by the hand into Damascus, Saul neither ate nor drank for three days; his companions had surely lost the gumption to arrest anyone. The Lord sends Ananias to a man on Straight Street, and Ananias protests – Lord, need I remind you who this is? “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:10–19). Ananias lays hands on him, scales fall, he is baptised and eats.

▶ 1:29:33

“And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God’,” and everyone asked whether this was not the man who made havoc of believers (Acts 9:20–22). Which apostle reached out to Saul? Ananias went, panicking, “but like the parables, who took principal interest in saving the lost? Jesus.”

▶ 1:30:58

A detour Matt apologised for in advance: nowhere does God change Saul’s name to Paul; Acts says he went by both (Acts 13:9), the way immigrants take a local name, or Matt was “Mert” in Turkey and is “Mateo” in Spanish. Why care? Because of “churchianity”: things believed because preachers say them,

and said because they are believed. “Don’t just believe stuff because I say it… preachers can be dangerous, especially when we’re real confident and we start yelling at you.”

Not man’s gospel

▶ 1:35:08

> “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ… But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles…”
>
> GALATIANS 1:11–18 ↗

▶ 1:36:33

Again, the active protagonist is God: he set Paul apart, called him, revealed his Son. Three applications. We do not promote a message of our own creation – “if it were, it would not nourish you” – and one of Matt’s main aims as a preacher is “to not be too creative with the content.” The gospel was revealed by Jesus after his ascension, so he is still around, still building. And the substance of Paul’s preaching, and ours, is Jesus himself.

▶ 1:38:58

After three years Paul spent fifteen days with Cephas and met James, the Lord’s brother. Fourteen years later he went to Jerusalem again and privately laid his gospel before the leaders, “in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.” They “added nothing to me,” recognised that the one who worked through Peter among the circumcised worked through Paul among the Gentiles – one gospel, different peoples – and gave him the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:1–9).

▶ 1:42:16

That is humility: after all his revelations, Paul double-checked, not because the apostles impressed him but because presenting Jesus correctly mattered. Yet Paul is not derivative of them. “There’s this Lord out there who’s very much alive and kind of wild and uncontrolled, who can do whatever he wants.” The apostolic structure protects truth; it does not limit Jesus, who can raise up whoever he wants, however he wants. Peter even counts Paul’s letters among “the other Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15–16). “I like that Jesus doesn’t need my permission to reach people I think are crazy.”

He doesn't need our permission

▶ 1:45:05

Paul was unreached and violent; no one handed him a tract; they hid from him. Jesus sought him out personally. "No matter how animated you are about finding salvation among the lost, he is all the more." Whether you are proud of your fruitfulness or depressed by your lack of it, "the church is Jesus's project. It is built on his broad and strong shoulders, and it does not rest on you. He lets you help; he doesn't need one ounce of your help."

▶ 1:46:31

He mentioned the British rapper M.I.A. – Sri Lankan, raised in England and Hindu, famous for "Paper Planes" – who has spoken openly of becoming a born-again Christian after a vision of Jesus, seemingly unconcerned about her career; and the many Muslims seeing visions of Jesus. "That doesn't prove the point; it's just emblematic of it. Jesus never has needed, doesn't need, and never will need our permission to save people."

▶ 1:47:34

Evangelicals especially put that burden on themselves, get crushed by it, "and we are not any more fruitful because of it. We're just freaked out." Matt wants to avoid giving the impression that the chief builder is AWOL and "if you don't act now, who will?" Behind emotional coercion is the assumption that no one would share the gospel without a whip. He will not bend what he believes to impress someone like M.I.A., hoping to "cool her into the kingdom" – "there is a Christ who can reveal himself, thank you very much." What Jesus wants is loyalty, not corner-cutting chores. And strategically, the most motivated witness may be one who knows how free they have been made, not one weighed down by a yelling religious leader.

▶ 1:50:22

> *"Lord, what are you doing here? I'm willing. I'm also dense, so if you're going to speak to them through me, would you make it really clear what to say? These are your coins. These are your sheep."*

▶ 1:51:36

"If you need encouragement, try to imagine God stressed out. It's so silly." Matt's hopes for Hope Chapel: welcoming newcomers, many Hope Groups and new leaders raised up by the Spirit – "kind of like a terror cell network, you can never quite pin it down... but without the terrorism" – and genuine friendships with non-Christians, filled with the vision that our Lord is alive, "not one big *Weekend at Bernie's* experiment" animated by our getting riled up. Talking about him is a privilege he gives us.

▶ 1:53:30

Think of it from Saul's side: try to destroy the Christian movement and you will fail. People will keep having visions of Jesus and giving their hearts to him, "and it won't stop – sometimes it's your own family, and they're praying for you." That is our Lord, not a passive, helpless, AWOL Jesus. Matt prayed that God would fill our vision, help us adore him, and let us sit at his feet like Mary (Luke 10:38–42) – willing to work, but adoring him even more.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Luke 15:1–7
- Luke 15:8–10
- Luke 15:11–24
- Luke 19:9–10
- Acts 8:1–3
- Acts 9:1–6
- Acts 9:10–19
- Acts 9:20–22
- Acts 13:9
- Galatians 1:11–18
- Galatians 2:1–9
- 2 Peter 3:15–16
- Luke 10:38–42

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. In what ways do you live as though Jesus founded the church and then left it in our hands?
2. In each Luke 15 parable, who does the seeking? What does it mean for you to be the sheep, the coin or the son rather than the hero?
3. The younger son expected to be taken back as a hired servant. Where do you expect less from God than he is ready to give?
4. What does Saul's conversion tell you about the people you consider unreachable?
5. How would sharing your faith change this week if you saw it as a privilege and an act of loyalty rather than a crushing duty?

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=SNEinHHdXZo&t=3936s

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.