

Vision Sunday

God doesn't need our help, God defines himself, and an invitation to glory

SPEAKER Matt Ryniker

DATE Sunday, October 30, 2022

PASSAGES 2 Samuel 6:1-9; Deuteronomy 4:15-19; Acts 17:25; Mark 4:33-34; Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4

MESSAGE Begins at 1:11:25 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus is real, not an idea or a lifestyle built on vibes — and because he is real, two things follow. God does not need our help to protect his reputation, and God alone defines who he is. Hope Chapel's calling is to know the real Christ through the whole witness of his apostles, and to accept his invitation to greater glory.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ God does not need employees. When we cut corners to “help” him or improve his reputation, we are reaching out to steady the ark like Uzzah.
- ◆ Friedrich Schleiermacher set out to save Christianity for modern sensibilities and ended up selling a version with no resurrection and no atonement at its core.
- ◆ The second commandment forbids making an image even of the true God. Idolatry is reducing God’s glory to something we can understand, not loving your family too much.
- ◆ We cannot know Jesus better than the men he spent every day with. There is no real Jesus apart from the apostolic witness — and “Tiki Jesus” cannot save anyone.
- ◆ Every correction from God is an invitation to glory, not a condemnation.
- ◆ Hope is called to guard worship and prayer, to use the gifts of the Spirit without fear, and to be a family — with fathers and mothers — for people the world has chewed up.
- ◆ “I am with you” has always meant God will do the heavy lifting. We are not his employees; we are his friends.

► 1:01:49

Before the message, Hope installed Scott McDonald and Jason Knox, already serving on the board, as elders. With their wives Lori and Tracy beside them, they answered the charges of Scripture, the church agreed to receive and pray for them, and current and former board members laid hands on them in prayer.

“Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.”

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:03:32

Then Peter’s charge: “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-4). Each answered, “With God’s help, I will.”

Revisiting the vision

► 1:11:25

A year and a half earlier, when Matt took the job, the board asked him to share his vision for Hope, and he wanted to revisit it. He paused to thank the board: “We don’t have a bureaucracy. To me, the board is like fathers and mothers.”

► 1:12:44

Both of his themes rest on one bedrock: Jesus is real. “He’s not an idea. Christianity isn’t a lifestyle built on vibes.” If he were an imaginary friend, anything you said about him would be true. Because he is real and knowable, he is not “a Gumby sort of Play-Doh thing we could shape however we wish.”

1. God does not need our help

► 1:13:16

Which raises the question: what does he want with us? He already has employees; if he wanted more angels, he could make them. Matt could have defended the point simply — God “is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything” (Acts 17:25) — but he chose a feistier passage.

► 1:13:51

“And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.”

2 SAMUEL 6:1–9 ↗

► 1:14:53

Sometimes God’s anger in Scripture does not make sense to us — “and when something has to give, it should be our sensibilities, not his.” The oxen literally stumbled and the cart wobbled, and Uzzah thought he could help. Matt’s interpretive leap: Uzzah acted on the notion that God needs stabilising by man. “He does not need our help.”

► 1:15:57

The whole message, he said, is a coin with two sides: a hard word, and an invitation. “Every time God corrects us, it is an invitation.” Our successes and failures never hinder his purposes. Yet we feel tempted to cut corners or blur lines, acting as God’s personal PR firm to improve his reputation.

Two theologians and their fathers

► 1:17:10

Friedrich Schleiermacher, raised Moravian by a minister father in the late 1700s, met Kant’s questions and Hume’s ridicule at university. He wrote home that “some people here” were struggling — and eventually admitted it was him: he did not believe in the atonement or the resurrection. His father’s reply was harsh.

► 1:18:50

About a century later J. Gresham Machen, raised in a similar home, wrote his father with similar doubts, and his father answered: *I understand, I love you, I’ve struggled with that myself, you can always talk to me.* Machen resolved his doubts and became one of America’s strongest defenders of Christianity.

► 1:20:01

Schleiermacher kept the label and wrote a systematic theology, using the same words but reimagining Christianity, “and the product he was selling was popular, but it had no Christ at its core.” Trying to protect the faith from extinction, he became “one of Christianity’s worst antagonists from the inside” — like Uzzah, stabilising God’s reputation. His theology is “like an ’80s haircut: it was cool at the time.” Meanwhile evangelical revivalists, empowered by the Spirit rather than “their big brain,” carried a power-filled gospel across every cultural, racial and social boundary through intimacy with Christ, spiritual gifts and fervent prayer.

2. God defines himself

► 1:21:57

“You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below.”

DEUTERONOMY 4:15–19 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:23:59

The first commandment already restricts Israel to one God, so the second is not redundant: *you don't know what I look like, so don't make an image of me*. God is fierce and strong — so why not a golden bull? And Israel did not call the calf Ashtoreth or Baal; they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 32:4). Idolatry all the same.

► 1:24:29

Pop Christian culture has redefined idolatry as loving something too much, which troubles sweet people who love their spouse or children or country. That is not idolatry; loving your people so much you would be cut off for them is Pauline (Romans 9:3). You can have an idolatrous relationship with something you do not even like.

► 1:25:31

So, two definitions. First, actually serving an idol — dropping a quarter at a monkey statue you pass each morning because you fear the traffic, even though it freaks you out. Second, the one Moses warns of: serving the true God *with* an idol: reducing his glory to something we can grasp, “like in Jurassic Park, filling in the DNA with frog DNA.” We can do both with Jesus — treating him like a transaction (say the prayer just so), or filling in the gaps with our assumptions until we have a little Tiki Jesus of our own.

3. No Tiki Jesus

► 1:27:36

The two themes combine. Worried about God's reputation among friends or on Facebook, we try to help by reimagining him so people will like him — “but Jesus never talked about that,” said in a way that sets him against an apostle. “I think it's arrogant for me to pretend I understand Jesus more profoundly than the men he spent all day with every day for years.”

► 1:28:12

“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.”

MARK 4:33–34 ↗

► 1:28:45

Jesus had his twelve, chosen after a night of prayer. If some “backwoods crazy man” later claimed a private revelation from Jesus, the apostles could say it never happened. Jesus entrusted himself to the

apostles to protect revelation, not hide it. That is why the church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42), and why, when the apostles affirmed Paul, we can trust him too. To say “Jesus never mentioned that” assumes a mysterious knowledge of Jesus’ private conversations to sit in judgment on the men who knew him. “Without their version of Jesus, there is no real Jesus.”

► 1:30:51

This matters because there is so much pain, sin, rebellion and death, and we need a real Saviour. The real Jesus heals, gives grace and patience and gifts. “Tiki Jesus does none of these things.” In a crisis, what power has a golden bull? So when God challenges us away from a Tiki Jesus, “it’s not a condemnation at all — it’s an invitation to know Christ better.”

► 1:32:03

So Matt wants to approach Christ through the whole New Testament — “the sweet, the spicy, the odd, all of it” — rather than assuming he just gets Jesus at a gut level. “This isn’t a Boy Scout troop. There’s a reason our church isn’t labelled Nice Folks Chapel. It’s called Hope Chapel because we have a hope and a real Lord and a real Saviour.” Christ is not the head of a “sin maintenance cult” but our liberator from true evil, and no one can keep the moral, sanitised Jesus and remove the “dead-raising, demon-crushing radical.” Many big brains have tried.

► 1:34:30

“I don’t want to do Christian TED Talks. We want to lift up the Lord of glory.”

An invitation to greater glory

► 1:35:15

Matt also follows a principle of proportionality: preach often what the Bible says often. Cover to cover it says *I will be their God, they will be my people, and I will dwell in their midst*; it invites us to be his children and follow faithfully; and it shows our temptation to idolatry. Those, he believes, lie behind our biggest spiritual struggles today.

► 1:36:10

Offering what he called “a pastoral chat,” not a prophetic word, to be weighed and prayed over: he senses God inviting Hope to greater glory and greater intimacy, “a time of learning to fight” — not watching spiritual struggles in fear but joining them in faith. “In the fight your faith is way less boring.”

► 1:37:47

What to expect from him: he will try not to invite human-focused solutions into leadership — “the kindness cult or wokeness or rules without the ruler” — and will teach the presentable, the difficult and the odd in Scripture. “Changing the world is not my goal. Staying on message is my goal.”

What Hope is called to

► 1:38:31

Worship and prayer are not a habit at Hope but a calling. Last week’s guests could not stop saying how refreshing it was to worship here; “it’s not normal to have so much freedom in worship.” He also wants the church to use and study the gifts of the Spirit. Focus on the Giver, yes — but if his children said, “Dad, I just want to focus on you,” and never opened his gift, “I’d be like, boy, that’s weird. Just open it.” Fear is sticky and it grows, which is part of why a 1 Corinthians series is coming after Advent.

► 1:41:28

The children’s and women’s ministries are strong through faithful plowing and prayer, “all the more reason to keep praying.” Picking up Joe’s men’s retreat report, Matt said men in our society have lost confidence in their role: real sexism was fought by dishonouring men instead of honouring women.

► 1:43:01

He believes the Lord will bring people chewed up and spat out by the world’s false promises, perhaps desperate, “this might be their last idea” — and when they come, he wants Hope to have both mothers and fathers. “The church is poised to be the family for people who are lost and broken.” He rejoiced in what God was already doing: the arts ministry and the foster and adoption ministry rebooted, a Taizé prayer service, and Wes’s “army of middle schoolers,” for whom the church must pray.

► 1:46:06

Ahead: restarting a college ministry, with the board funding a college evangelist; continued outreach with Brentwood Elementary, mailings, Makers Markets, the Good News Club and a women’s home. But there is special favour on the person-to-person invitation to a home or a meal. “Ask God where that can fit in your life” — inconvenient, perhaps, “but it’s an invitation to glory.”

A tree by the water

► 1:47:02

None of it will last “unless we’re drinking from the fountain of life ourselves, not just pointing to it.” Hope has survived the 2016 election, Covid and 2020’s upheavals because, like a tree planted by water (Psalm 1:3), its strength was never in itself but in the river. Through all that trauma and coping, some

have let vipers and poisonous vines into the gardens of their homes. “What’s next? Some gardening is next. Some fighting is next.” It is not judgment but invitation and medicine: repent of fear, re-evaluate the media we consume, and focus on Christ.

► 1:48:32

Lastly, Hope serves at Jesus’ pleasure. He does not need this church; he could raise up another. “We’re not his employees — we’re his friends.” And when Jesus says “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20), it means what it meant for Gideon (Judges 6:16): *I’m doing the fighting; you don’t even need most of those men.* “I am with you’ has never meant this might work. It has always meant God is going to do it — and you can come or not.”

► 1:50:13

So: God doesn’t need our help. What does he want? Us. We cannot make him up as we go, because there is only one Lord and he is real. “All of this is good news, and all of this is an invitation” — even to fight, even to focus — “an invitation to know him more and to walk in greater glory.” He prayed that God would reveal his glory, strengthen the church’s walk with him, “and animate us to fight.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [1 Timothy 3:1–7 \(NIV\)](#)
- [1 Peter 5:1–4](#)
- [Acts 17:25](#)
- [2 Samuel 6:1–9](#)
- [Deuteronomy 4:15–19 \(NIV\)](#)
- [Exodus 32:4](#)
- [Romans 9:3](#)
- [Mark 4:33–34](#)
- [Acts 2:42](#)
- [Psalm 1:3](#)
- [Matthew 28:20](#)
- [Judges 6:16](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where are you tempted, like Uzzah, to “steady” God — cutting corners or softening things to protect his reputation?
2. How does Matt’s definition of idolatry, reducing God’s glory to something we can understand, differ from the one you grew up with?
3. What features of a “Tiki Jesus” are popular around you, and which parts of the apostles’ witness do you find hardest to receive?
4. Matt sensed God inviting Hope into “a time of learning to fight.” What fight might God be inviting you into, and what fear would you need to repent of?
5. Who could you invite into your home for a meal this month, as part of being family for the lost and broken?

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=XbxMKuu4fbM&t=4285s>

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.