Divine Commitment

Counting the cost, and the God who always finishes what he starts

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 4, 2022
PASSAGES	Luke 14:25-33; Philippians 1:3-6; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; John 4:31-34
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:10:44 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus wants a hundred percent commitment — but read through a Christ-centred lens, his teaching about counting the cost says more about God than about us. God does not start what he cannot finish. The incarnation is the proof: he came, he committed, and he will complete what he began in us.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- "Hating" your family and your life means not clinging to this sinking ship so tightly that you cannot grasp the only source of life.
- We take up our cross not to die for the ungodly — Jesus already did that — but so that his death and resurrection become ours.
- "Do better" is the rally cry of dead religion. Every false faith is a ladder from earth to heaven, and every brand has one.
- If it is in God's character not to start what he cannot finish, then he has not started your life or his church and then lost interest.
- Jesus is "Mr Commitment." Treating him as someone who will drop us the moment we waver is confusing him for a devil.
- Christ is our righteousness, sanctification and redemption — a person, not a process — so that the one who boasts boasts in the Lord.

- Jesus feeds on seeking and saving the lost. He will always love us more than we love him back, and we must let him be better than us.

▶ 1:10:44

Matt opened a short Advent series — "for which I only had three good sermons anyway." One thing we know about the incarnation is that it is proof of God's commitment. He asked the congregation to stick with him through an intense passage, read with a Jesus-centred lens, "and then we'll see how glorious and wonderful that intensity really is."

An intense invitation

▶ 1:11:18

> "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.'"
>
> LUKE 14:25–33 ↗

▶ 1:11:51

"With our twisted minds it's natural that we twist his words." Jesus is not advocating hatefulness; he tells us to love even our enemies and bless those who persecute us (Matthew 5:43–44). Read with the line about the cross, hating your own life means not clinging to this world so tightly that you cannot grasp him wholly. "So often we find ourselves clinging to the things we know and love when really it's a sinking ship, and he's saying, let go of it all the way and cling to me." It is an invitation "to drink deep from the wells of salvation."

▶ 1:13:33

Then the two pictures: the man who lays a foundation without counting the cost and is mocked for not finishing, and the king who will not march ten thousand against twenty thousand without first deliberating. "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

▶ 1:14:03

Jesus wants a hundred percent. We are tempted to embrace his message when it is easy and fall back when it is hard. Riches, fame and relationships can be used for God, but they cannot save us from sin, darkness and death. Only Jesus can, because he died for sinners and gave us his life for free.

Whose cross?

▶ 1:15:17

We want to be like Jesus, but not one hundred percent: "You don't want to be the Jewish Messiah who dies for the sins of the world, because that's like a Christ complex... That is not you. Thanks, I'm glad we're all on that same page."

▶ 1:15:54

He calls us to the cross not so that we can die for the ungodly too, but because he died for the ungodly and we fit the description — "the cowardly, the weak and the fickle, that's us" — so that his death becomes ours and his resurrection power becomes ours. God does want all of us; it is his character. "But if you want to find a hundred percent commitment in purity, power, love and devotion even unto death, there's really only one place to find that."

The rally cry of dead religion

▶ 1:17:14

So read this teaching — and all of Scripture — christocentrically, "with Jesus-coloured glasses." You might expect him to say: don't waver, I saw you hesitate, that's a strike. "Do better." That, Matt said, is "the rally cry of dead religion, the voice of dead works, man-centred false faith." First tips, then pep talks, then stern warnings, then threats.

▶ 1:17:59

"Every false faith that you can find on this earth is a ladder from earth to heaven." It starts out fun: several rungs below me, Mother Teresa above, the people I dislike back there, "and I'm in the zone." And every brand has one — liberal, conservative, Pentecostal: log enough Bible hours, bring in some scalps, "one day Jesus might like you." ("I'm getting a little edgy. I'll back it off.") The point is not to focus on ourselves, which is boring anyway.

He does not start what he cannot finish

▶ 1:19:43

In Jesus' mind it is not right to start what you cannot finish, to begin a war without enough troops, or a tower without enough money. In his mind, all in is the only way to go. "I know what it says about us — that's not all that interesting. What does it say about him?"

▶ 1:20:22

It says he does not start things he cannot finish. Did Jesus begin to build the church, fall asleep, sleepwalk through the Reformation, then nod off again? Did he discover too late that we are incompetent, or that he lacks the power or patience for this generation? “I promise you he will build his church until she’s complete, and I know he will because he started.” And he is committed to you, “because he reached out to you already. He’s called to you. He’s spoken to you.”

▶ 1:21:50

Many of us are insecure in our faith, and that is why “do better” feels good — a shot of adrenaline. We suspect Jesus wanted our conversion and then moved on because we are a hassle. So we try to earn the favour he already poured out, the affection he showed while we were still his “frothing mad enemies” (Romans 5:8–10).

Mr Commitment

▶ 1:22:57

“God forbid we depict Jesus like a sleazeball who only wants one thing from you, and once he gets it he moves on” — once he finds out you are a leaky vessel who needs a lot of attention. “In contrast to those kind of sleazy guys, he is Mr Right. He is Mr Commitment. He makes the most faithful and energetic husbands look like sad clowns. He makes the most forgiving person you’ve ever met look like an inanimate object.”

▶ 1:23:40

It takes the Spirit’s power to understand how committed he is. Do we think he died for sinners but has no patience for his own bride? “His goodness and his mercy and his kindness will hound you and bring you back home again and again, because he doesn’t start things he doesn’t want to finish.”

▶ 1:24:18

We hear his hard words and think, *I wavered, it’s over; maybe I blasphemed the Holy Spirit.* But blasphemy against the Spirit was people confusing Jesus for a devil (Matthew 12:24–32) — and treating him as one who wants only perfect obedience and will abandon us for anything less “is confusing Jesus for a devil.” Do you long for intimacy with him? “Not as much as he does.” Do you wonder if he will accept you after the last stupid thing you did? “He longs for it more. He’s Mr Reconciliation.”

“He who began a good work”

▶ 1:25:34

> "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."
>
> PHILIPPIANS 1:3–6 ↗

Matt read it first as "I am pretty sure… he will probably bring it to completion" — "man, I'm being cheesy." Paul is sure.

▶ 1:26:46

> "…as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:4–9 ↗

▶ 1:27:29

Why will they be sustained? Not "because I know you can do better," but "because God is faithful." He sustains us; it rests on his character, not our efforts; and its purpose is fellowship — intimacy — with his Son.

Righteousness is a person

▶ 1:28:19

Matt dislikes testimonies that say, in effect, *I knocked on heaven's door until it opened; maybe one day you'll have a certain percentage of the Holy Spirit like me.* "Like Dragon Ball Z — you're always growing in power, but it's never enough." Thanks be to God, the Spirit did not come in percentages but as a person, "the fullness of God given to crummy people."

▶ 1:29:00

> "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:30–31 ↗

▶ 1:29:42

Forsake sin, yes — but it is grace that teaches us to say no to ungodliness (Titus 2:11–12). Pursue purity, but our righteousness is a person. Repent with all your heart, but that is not the engine of redemption; our redemption is a person. Sanctification is called a process, "but really it's a person." So in the end we have nothing to boast about: "we got steamrolled by this engine of grace."

▶ 1:30:24

He did not pursue us because we were "vibing just right," but because he is love; it is his essential nature. He made you to be the object of his love, not because he needed a back-scratcher — he has angels for that. "Earth isn't heaven's sweatshop." Ancient Near Eastern texts said man was made to feed the gods. "This is Mr Heaven himself coming to us when we weren't even looking for him" — worse, while we were biting the hand trying to feed us.

He lives for this

▶ 1:31:40

When the disciples urged Jesus to eat, he said, "I have food to eat that you do not know about... My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:31–34). They thought he meant a secret snack. Jesus does not seek the lost merely because it is right; "he feeds on it." The return on investment on us is terrible, "but he's pursuing us because he lives for that. He gets amped by it."

▶ 1:32:51

Think of it as a low-interest loan you will eventually repay? You will not. Every day in heaven he will love you more than you love him back, "and it's just going to keep getting worse for you" — with a religious mentality, heaven itself would drive you nuts. He is so full of life, forgiveness, patience and joy, "and we're just like a wooden duck barely moving."

▶ 1:33:51

"Will we let him love us more than we love him back? Is there any space in our mind to just let him be better?" That may be one of the hardest things we do. Let go of the religious garbage, as he says, and do not cling even to your parents more than to him, because life is found nowhere else.

▶ 1:34:18

> *"He doesn't start things he won't stop. He was born a baby, he did the whole church thing, he didn't just fall asleep. He always finishes what he starts."*

▶ 1:34:44

That, Matt said, is why we have total hope that we will see him in glory and that he will receive us with kindness, mercy and affection: he has already started, and he is going to keep going. He prayed for the Holy Spirit to come in power “to enable us to comprehend more of your love.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Luke 14:25–33
- Matthew 5:43–44
- Romans 5:8–10
- Matthew 12:24–32
- Philippians 1:3–6
- 1 Corinthians 1:4–9
- 1 Corinthians 1:30–31
- Titus 2:11–12
- John 4:31–34

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What does it look like for you to stop clinging to “a sinking ship” so that you can cling to Jesus?
2. Matt called “do better” the rally cry of dead religion. Where do you hear that voice in your own faith, and what does it produce in you?
3. If God does not start what he cannot finish, what has he started in your life that you have been afraid he would abandon?
4. What changes when you think of your righteousness, sanctification and redemption as a person rather than a process?
5. How might you let Jesus love you more than you love him back this Advent week?

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=V2Kcim4UmEA&t=4244s

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.