Christ Is Our Covenant

A one-sided covenant, a peace treaty in his blood, and Gladys at the pearly gates

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 18, 2022
PASSAGES	Hebrews 8:8-12; Luke 22:14-20; John 5:39-40; John 11:21-26; Colossians 1:26-27; Romans 10:3-4
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:12:39 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

In the new covenant God does all the work: he writes his law on our hearts, he is our God, he forgives and forgets our sins. And Jesus does not merely broker that covenant — he is it, in his own body and blood. So our security does not rest on how well we gave our lives to him, but on how well he gave his life for us. "Instead of saying how strong is my faith today, ask how strong is his faithfulness."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. God's covenant with Abraham is a template: God's part was to promise and give; Abraham's was to be old and childless and receive.
- In the new covenant promise God does all the action verbs. The new covenant is a one-sided deal that makes no worldly or religious sense.
- You can miss Jesus by memorising the whole Bible and still missing who it points to — and you can miss him by making him up as you go.
- Jesus does not say, "I know where the resurrection is found." He says, "I am the resurrection and the life." The gospel is a person.
- While we were murdering him, he was making a peace treaty in his blood.
- Dead religion says, "Where they failed, you must succeed — now with new tools." Christ himself is our prayer life, our forty-day fast, our obedience.

- Insecurity, legalism and self-focus travel together. Secure in him, we are free to give, pray and toil joyfully.

▶ 1:12:39

After a combined choir from Hope and Northwest Fellowship led worship, Matt welcomed everyone — "with or without gum" — and said that what Hope does is "not Christian TED Talks." Once more he returned to the invitation he had been pressing for weeks: to let God's joy and victory invade our areas of failure and brokenness.

An area for his victory

▶ 1:13:16

You could advertise it as spiritual warfare, but Matt preferred to package it as "God's victory being given to us where our strength has failed." He asked for a short silence to let God help each person isolate one area: a discipline like giving or fasting where there had been no joy, only failure; or bitterness and unforgiveness "where in your own strength you just couldn't."

▶ 1:14:39

Which set up the day's focus: the strength of the Lord and what he has done single-handedly. "Jesus is our covenant. The incarnation shows a one-sided covenant."

What a covenant is

▶ 1:15:28

Not really a religious word: a binding agreement between two parties. God's covenant with Abraham is a good model for ours with Christ: God promised land, many descendants, a specific child, favour and blessing (Genesis 15:1–6), and "Abraham's main role was to be old and childless," then receive. "Exceptionally hard work, you may say." Later, Israel's elders ratified the covenant given at Sinai with a meal in God's presence (Exodus 24:9–11).

▶ 1:17:10

> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt… For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."
>
> HEBREWS 8:8–12 ↗

A one-sided deal

▶ 1:19:13

Look at who does the action verbs. God will put, write, be, be merciful, remember no more. What will the people do? Be his people — and one of their main described actions is something they will *not* need to do: teach one another to know the Lord, because they already will. "This looks like a one-sided deal. God's doing all the lifting."

▶ 1:19:46

That makes no sense by the elementary principles of this world — karma, reaping what you sow, "there's no free lunch." Nor does it make religious sense, which projects a human lord onto the Father and imagines a quid pro quo where he accepts our striving.

▶ 1:21:05

When Matt attended a mosque weekly, he learned of the Night of Power during Ramadan: pray all night and your slate returns to zero — but no one knows exactly which night, so you pray several to be sure. Religion becomes a system to game, aiming not for Mother Teresa's level but for "a happy golden area" better than average, "just a little bit proud of ourselves."

Searching the Scriptures, missing the person

▶ 1:22:02

Jesus told his opponents, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39–40). Hope wants to take Scripture seriously and authoritatively without picking and choosing. But a church like that is tempted to cling to the Scriptures, be proud of it, and miss who they point to.

▶ 1:23:06

Loosening our grip on the Bible is not the answer. “You can miss Jesus and memorise the whole Bible, but you can also miss Jesus by making it up as you go.” We want neither an ad hoc Jesus nor a morality ladder to heaven — which comes in conservative, liberal and Pentecostal brands alike. The Scriptures bear witness “not about a vibe or a lifestyle or the opportunity of a lifetime,” but to a person. “The gospel is a person.”

“I am the resurrection”

▶ 1:25:11

Lazarus fell sick, and Jesus delayed; by the time he came they were well into the funeral — “before Jesus ruins it.”

> “Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.’”
>
> JOHN 11:21–26 ↗

▶ 1:26:33

Jesus did not say, “I know where the resurrection is found; just copy me and I’ll help if you need it.” Resurrection and life are not on the far side of a formula; they are found in the person of Jesus. And he does not say whoever becomes like him enough finds life, but whoever believes in him. The covenant is not a deal that resets your debt to zero, like the Night of Power, and leaves you to carry on with “the self-centred nonsense of human striving.” “The covenant is his finished work in his person.”

A peace treaty in his blood

▶ 1:27:05

> “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”
>
> LUKE 22:14–20 ↗

▶ 1:28:18

Remember the new covenant promise: we will be his people, he will be our God, he will be merciful. Where is that new covenant found? Not in a fresh start, but in his blood. A covenant is like a treaty, and he says the cup is his blood and his blood is the covenant. "So just in case we missed something: while we were busy murdering him, he was making a peace treaty in his blood." Even our worst contribution he used for our benefit.

▶ 1:29:01

Paul speaks of "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people… Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26–27), the mystery of God, "namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2–3).

Same project, new tools?

▶ 1:30:14

Through the year's journey through the Bible, the mystery stayed hidden while Israel failed. Judges helped, but turned out like the people. Prophets spoke for God, but people did not always listen, and some prophets were false. A good king brought blessing, a bad one a heavy yoke — "there was a lot of bad kings, though." Faithful priests came and went, and none could get inside the people's hearts.

▶ 1:31:21

So dead religion, even with a Jesus sticker on it, says: where Israel failed, you must succeed. You might even say Jesus and his blood are new tools for the same project — "the same up-to-us nonsense, we just have new technology incorporated." We can treat the gifts of the Spirit that way too. "That's not what we're doing."

▶ 1:32:25

"Do better" especially appeals to highly functional people — like smart students who never learn to study until they are in over their heads. "I always make my bed first thing in the morning. I finished my to-do list before nine… This preacher said I could do better; he gave me eight steps — well, I found a ninth."

▶ 1:33:02

"Our peace treaty with God is God." When people protest that Jesus cannot be the only way to God, Matt's answer is: "Jesus is God. Of course the only way to God is God. You'll have a better idea?" We do not want to be like those Paul describes, "being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own… For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:3–4).

▶ 1:35:06

People love tips from religious leaders, so here are some: Do you want the spiritual benefit of a rich prayer life? Of a forty-day fast and single-minded obedience? Of radical generosity, faithfulness in temptation, and love for enemies to the point of death? "I'd like to introduce you to someone who is your prayer life, who is your forty-day fast… Sink into union with God by Christ's efforts, not yours."

Gladys at the pearly gates

▶ 1:35:48

Matt recalled a junior high skit on Galatians 2:20, some of its stars now in the room. Gladys, a sweet old Presbyterian, dies and meets Peter at a folding table in "the old den upstairs." Reading her file, he keeps remarking how much they have in common: you worked with your hands, you didn't make it to your forties, you worked odd jobs in construction, you walked on water, you were raised Jewish, you had an impressive beard. "I'm eighty-seven… I'm a woman named Gladys." Then angels drag her, kicking and screaming, into heaven.

▶ 1:38:07

Peter was reading her the life of Christ. "God forbid that she would insist on him finding her actual file." That is the point of the incarnation: he took on flesh, so that his flesh and blood could be our covenant.

"What did you do to be saved?"

▶ 1:38:46

When people ask Matt how to be saved, he says: Christ died, descended to the dead, was raised, ascended and rules in heaven. *Yes, but how do I become saved?* The same answer. *Stop being cute — what did you do?* The same. *How do you, Matt Ryniker, know you're saved?* "Because Christ died and descended to the dead and was raised on the third day… That's what I did. I did a lot of hard work there."

▶ 1:40:31

Did Jesus die for me because I said a prayer? He died for you before you were born. Will he un-die for you because you were bad today? "Those are the precise people he came to die for." He is the way, the truth, the life, the resurrection, the gospel (John 14:6) — no big hat and sceptre required. ("Can I call you Reverend?" "Please don't.")

▶ 1:41:49

> *"You were not saved because you gave your life to Christ. You were saved because Christ gave his life for you."*

Not because you walked the Romans road, but because Jesus walked the road to Golgotha. Not because you prayed a prayer, but because Christ's offering became your prayer to the Father. Not because you walked to the altar, but because Christ went to the altar of the cross. Not because you opened a new chapter, but because he opened the tomb. Not because your baptism was performed just right, but because by grace you were baptised into his death and resurrection.

▶ 1:43:01

You cannot trust a single thing you did to have been done correctly — did you give all of your life, walk the road hard enough, stay at the altar long enough? Insecurity, legalism and self-focus go hand in hand. Ask instead: did he give his life well enough? Was his intercession good enough? Did he die properly? "He conquered the grave — but did he do it good enough? Instead of saying how strong is my faith today, ask how strong is his faithfulness."

▶ 1:44:34

As insecurity melts and confidence in him grows, legalism, fear and striving can drop away. Then, secure in him, "toil all you want. You can give generously all you want… you can pray all you want in that joy of true freedom," because you are no longer confused about why you are saved and why you have the Father's favour.

▶ 1:46:08

This is not "do better" but an invitation to glory: to rest in his joy and the finished work of the cross. In Advent we see a covenant perfectly made and perfectly pulled off. Even those who opposed him and caused his death, he used: "the blood that they caused to shed was his peace treaty with himself. There was no way we could mess him up."

▶ 1:46:52

He prayed: we receive your covenant, we repent of human striving, we reject setting our own righteousness beside yours, and we embrace "Mr Gospel, Jesus Christ himself" — "help us to believe with our whole hearts that you did it well enough."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Genesis 15:1–6
- Exodus 24:9–11
- Hebrews 8:8–12
- John 5:39–40
- John 11:21–26
- Luke 22:14–20
- Colossians 1:26–27
- Colossians 2:2–3
- Romans 10:3–4
- Galatians 2:20
- John 14:6

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Read Hebrews 8:8–12 and notice who does the action verbs. How does a one-sided covenant challenge the way you usually think about your relationship with God?
2. Matt said we can miss Jesus by clinging to Scripture without seeing who it points to, or by making him up as we go. Which danger are you more prone to?
3. What would it mean for you to believe that Jesus himself is your prayer life, your obedience and your righteousness?
4. Where does insecurity about whether you did enough show up in your faith, and what does asking "how strong is his faithfulness?" change?
5. What area of failure will you bring to Christ this week to rest in his finished work rather than "do better"?

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=EdiYjxeIcu4&t=4359s

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.