Not a Place but a Person

Where evil came from, why it has no nature of its own, and why heaven is a person

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, November 8, 2026
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 15:20-26; Genesis 3:22-23; Colossians 1:16; 1 Timothy 6:16; Isaiah 14:12-14; 2 Peter 1:3-4; Romans 6:4-5; Titus 2:11-13; Genesis 1:1; Genesis 1:31; John 1:3; Exodus 3:13-14
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:10:26 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Evil has no nature of its own. It is always something good that God made, reduced and twisted — which means it has no creativity, no independent power, and no future. And since no creature holds existence on its own authority, our security in the age to come cannot be a safer location. It is a person. Plugged into the one who by nature cannot sin, we will be freer than we are now and immune to a second fall.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Freedom is not the raw power to do anything. It is ability according to nature. God cannot sin, and that inability is a strength — the way an unsinkable ship is more free on the water than a poorly made one.
- There is no such thing as an evil nature. Evil is not part of God, not eternal, not created by God, and not created by anyone else — because there is only one creator.
- So evil is derivative: ugliness is beauty reduced, sickness is health reduced, impurity is purity twisted. Death is not even possible without life first.
- God's opponents depend on him for their existence in the very act of rebelling. Every moment Satan has is borrowed breath.
- Adam and Eve never possessed immortality. They were sent out of the garden away from the tree of life, and that was mercy — immortality in a corrupted state would have been the horror.

- Christ could not stay dead, and not merely because it was unjust. He is the source of life itself; death had nothing to hold him with.
- Death will be destroyed, not paused. When the last enemy is gone, there is no list of new ones behind it.
- We are not returning to Eden. Eden had a fall in it. We are being built into the body of the Son, which is a privilege Satan never had.

▶ 1:10:26

Matt restated the question the whole message hangs on, twice, because he knew people were walking in cold: why is there evil at all? Sin and rebellion. Why is there sin and rebellion? Because love and loyalty require the freedom not to give them. Most of us are fine down to that layer. The hard push is the next one — will we be free in heaven, and if we are, what possible security do we have that our freedom won't start the whole thing over again?

1. Freedom is ability according to nature

▶ 1:11:00

Americans in particular, Matt said, define freedom as the raw power to act. That is why it sounds strange in our ears to say that God *cannot* sin — as though we were taking something away from him. He will not sin, and not because he nearly did and pulled back at the last second. It is not in his nature.

“His inability to sin is not a weakness. It's a strength,” Matt said, “like our inability to spontaneously combust. That's a strength.” Or an unsinkable ship, which is more free to navigate the water than a sinkable one, because it is built better. Freedom in this sense is ability according to nature — a design, an identity. Squirrels are free to do squirrel things and birds to do bird things, and neither is impoverished for not being the other. God by nature does not sin. We were not designed to sin either, and yet there it is, which is exactly why we are *less* free than he is.

2. Is there such a thing as an evil nature?

▶ 1:12:49

If squirrels have a nature and plants have a nature and light has a nature, is there anything that is evil *by design*? Matt laid the question out as a logic puzzle with no comfortable exits. If evil natures exist, they are either part of God or not. If you say part of God — the New Age answer, where everything is a reflection of the divine — you are stuck, because evil is real and God is good. So evil is external to God.

Then either it has always existed, like a rival deity living somewhere in God's neighborhood, or it began. And if it began, either God made it or somebody else did.

3. There is one creator, and he only made good things

▶ 1:13:56

Genesis 1:1 does not say God and several other beings collectively made things, mostly God. The Nicene Creed holds the same line in both directions: one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen — and the Son, true God from true God, begotten not made, through whom all things were made. Which is John 1:3 almost word for word: all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

And what he made, he made good — "behold, it was very good". So God is not the author of our rebellion in any way. And "everything" is not limited to what you can see and touch.

▶ 1:16:04

> "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him."
>
> COLOSSIANS 1:16 ↗

4. The answer much of the early church reached

▶ 1:17:17

Matt was careful to say he did not come up with the solution, and equally careful about why he was citing Athanasius and Augustine. Not because old writing is automatically better: "It's not that old is good or new is good. It's that good is good and bad writing is bad writing. And you could find that in every generation."

▶ 1:18:59

Close every door in turn. Evil natures are not part of God, because there is no shadow of evil in him. Evil is not eternal in origin, because before creation — if "before" even means anything without spacetime — there was only God, with no neighbors. Evil natures were not created by God, because he made everything good and rested. And Satan did not create them either, because there are no rival creators. What is left is hard to articulate and worth sitting with: evil exists, but it does not possess a substance or a nature the way light does. It is what weakness is to strength. Derivative. A form of decay.

Does the devil have an evil nature the way a dog has a dog nature? If he does, God made him that way — no. Then did he make his own nature, which would make him a creator — no. So evil is, by definition, taking something God made good and reducing or tarnishing it. Ugliness is not a separate phenomenon from beauty; it is beauty reduced. Sickness is health reduced. Impurity is purity twisted. Death is not even possible without life.

▶ 1:20:57

Which puts the cosmic battle in a different light. “God's opponents in every respect and in every moment are dependent on him even for their existence as they rebel against him,” Matt said. “He doesn't exist all on his own. Every moment is borrowed breath. God could turn him off like that.”

5. Rebellion departs from good; it does not invent

▶ 1:21:39

Isaiah 14 is addressed to the arrogant king of Babylon, and many have heard a second meaning in it. Matt read it with the taunt left in.

> “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! … You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high… I will make myself like the Most High.’”
>
> ISAIAH 14:12–14 ↗

Any power anyone has was given. He was put in a place and was irresponsible in it. The move is always the same: receive a gift, then twist it. Adam and Eve were not designed to sin either — they were part of everything God made and called very good, and they were free to rebel, and they did. Matt would not let that stay at a distance. Read Romans 5 carefully and the question “what would I have done in the garden?” dissolves. You were there. We all did it.

6. A close reading of Genesis 3 — kicked out of what?

▶ 1:23:26

Matt plays a game with his discipleship classes: find me the verse where God is walking in the garden with Adam and Eve. Everyone is confident. Ten minutes later nobody has found it, because we know this story so well that we have quietly added to it. The same thing happens with the punishment. His students say they were driven out of God's presence — and his first question back is whether God is

therefore trapped in the garden, since he goes on speaking to Cain, to Abraham, to Moses, to David. So what was in the garden that they lost access to?

▶ 1:24:21

> "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.
>
> GENESIS 3:22–23 ↗

"It's such a horrendous thought that God doesn't even finish his sentence," Matt said. The tree was hypothetical access to indefinite life, not proof that we carry immortality inside us. In a corrupted, diminished state, being barred from it was mercy. Death was the punishment.

▶ 1:25:36

> "...who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen."
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 6:16 ↗

This is why Matt will not teach that the soul is inherently immortal. Our spirits, our souls, our bodies, angels, demons, the devil, principalities and powers — none of them hold existence on their own authority. He noted that the King James habit of rendering "soul" as "immortal soul" added a word nobody needed, and that added words are not always helpful. Any day of our existence, now or in the age to come, is a gift and a permission.

▶ 1:26:39

Which took him to the burning bush, where Moses asks for a name and gets "I am who I am". "He is being itself, existence, life. He just is uniquely. No one else is like that."

7. Which is why Christ could not stay dead

▶ 1:27:11

Not primarily because the execution was unjust and God decided it wasn't fair. It is about who he is: the great I am, the Lord of life, raw being. The Pentecost sermon says it with a phrase worth slowing down on — Acts 2:22–24, where God raised him up, "because it was not possible for him to be held by it."

There is only one who possesses immortality. God the Son took flesh, we killed him, and death had nothing to hold him with.

▶ 1:28:13

> "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order... Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–26 ↗

There is a finality in that paragraph, and Matt wanted it heard as an answer rather than a flourish. Death will be defeated, not put in timeout. Every rule, every authority, every power subdued. And the *last* enemy means what it says — there is no queue of new ones forming behind it.

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8. Not a place but a person

▶ 1:29:58

So: how can we have everlasting life, and why won't we sin again? Both are resolved in the same person. "Our destiny is not a place but a person hidden in the God man," Matt said. "Paradise sure is going to be the bomb.com. But he is our great hope." He read Titus 2:11–13 and landed on the object of the waiting: not an address, but "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

▶ 1:31:20

And here is why the second fall cannot happen. We are not being returned to Adam and Eve's state. That state had a fall in it. The story does not culminate in going back to the beginning; there is a direction, a purpose, a wedding supper of the Lamb. It is being plugged into him the way a branch is into the vine — and he, by nature, cannot sin.

▶ 1:31:54

"It's not that we're just going to be in paradise brushed up and cleaned up a little where God's always changing our batteries to make sure we still keep going, enjoying ourselves in Valhalla, ghost paradise," he said. "It's not that we'll be having our batteries changed. We'll be plugged directly into the source." Then he handed it to Peter, who "says it better than I do."

> "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."
>
> 2 PETER 1:3–4 ↗

Escaped from the corruption — which is the same category the whole first half of the message had been working on. "Remember what evil is," Matt said. "It's not its own separate source. It's not its own separate power or nature. It's what God has created diminished, destroyed, tarnished or twisted."

▶ 1:33:02

"Your existence in the everlasting is not because you're just some inherently immortal soul that happened to be good enough or get put in a good place," Matt said. "You are an utterly dependent mortal who's plugged into the immortal one himself." And to the obvious objection — but will I still be free? — he gave the shortest answer of the morning: "He's freer than you are and cannot." Our freedom and our life are derivative of his.

9. Baptized into him, and progressing past Eden

▶ 1:34:04

He admitted he kept giving away the ending: "I just keep seeing your faces and I'm like, they're worried." Then he read it once more from the other side.

> "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."
>
> ROMANS 6:4–5 ↗

▶ 1:34:35

With the anxiety lowered, he walked the prompt back out from the top, slower, so people could carry it home. Why are there bad things? Why is there evil? Sin and rebellion. Why is there sin and rebellion? Because there is a freedom to choose loyalty to him or not — you can choose to love him or not. And then the asymmetry most of us have backwards. "That doesn't affect God because he's by nature love.

He is love," Matt said. "It does affect you. It affects angels apparently as well." The damage of rebellion lands on the rebel, never on the one rebelled against.

▶ 1:35:10

And the certainty question, which is the one people actually lose sleep over — how do I know there won't be another fall, a whole other story, another incarnation, all that stuff? "Because God is going to completely overcome his enemies. All of them. And the last enemy to be defeated will be death. And by last enemy, that's it. There's no more new enemies. And you will be completely free. Freer than you are now. And you will be alive."

▶ 1:35:44

Someone always asks whether heaven will be boring. Matt's answer was to ask when you have felt most alive — mountain biking fast with the wind going by, bungee jumping, jumping out of an airplane, reading a book on a rainy day. Bottle and distill that and you would be a trillionaire, because feeling alive is the thing we actually want. "There's nothing boring about feeling alive and animated and energetic." Now set all of it next to his breath, raw being, the great I am. "I can't imagine anything less boring."

▶ 1:36:37

"Well, there it is," he said, and gave the answer in one line: the goal is not a place. "That's the new age creeping in. The goal is a person." The Lord of life, the one who simply is, could not stay dead — "which means he's not going to run out of juice." He even took the worry about capacity: "You know, you think, oh, all these people plugged into him. That's a lot of amps." There is no load limit on being itself.

▶ 1:37:51

So the security is not a better address. "We have total security in Christ that it'll never happen again. We will be freer than ever, immune to rebellion at that point because we're not just existing in a good place like Adam and Eve and Satan." That is the sentence to hold onto — Adam, Eve and Satan all had the good place, and it did not hold them. "This will be a privilege Satan never had," to be plugged into God himself. We are not merely returning to Eden; we are progressing to something he could only call far better, so unspeakably better there are no words for it.

▶ 1:38:29

What he would not allow was a picture of the age to come as Eden with better catering — ten times the food and drink and songs and mirth and dancing, forever. "Trillion years later, you're like, I guess we should do that jig again." Far better than that, and not because the amenities improve. "It's getting built into the body of God the Son, which is an unspeakable glory and privilege and honor." And that, he said, resolves every question the message had been circling — where evil comes from, how God overcomes it in our lives now, how we can be certain it is final: "the answer is the person of Jesus all the way down."

10. The life is in the blood — whose life?

▶ 1:39:00

The mechanism underneath all of it is the incarnation: “God the Son taking on humanity so that joined to him our humanity can breathe in the life of God.” Picking up something Thomas had said earlier in the service about the cross as the great act of spiritual warfare, Matt put it as a question and then answered his own question. Jesus gave his life on the cross, because that is what is in the blood — the life. Whose life? God's life. “Tell me about God's life. It's infinite. It's powerful. Cannot be tempted to sin. Will not sin. Cannot sin. Cannot run out. Is love. Imagine being plugged directly into that like a branch to a vine.”

▶ 1:39:33

“Such confidence, such hope, such wonderful hope.” Which is the whole difference between this and the vague afterlife hope on offer around us. Unlike the new age world, we are not hoping to die and go to the good place. We were baptized into the person of Jesus and into his death, and we expect to be raised the way he was — like him, in him, forever, and not loosely attached but inseparably connected to our Lord.

▶ 1:40:10

He closed the way he always closes, by handing the response back to the Spirit instead of assigning one: “I'm not exactly sure what the Holy Spirit will prompt you to do as a response to this, but you know, maybe he'll remind you to call your mom.” Then the question he put to God on the room's behalf — “how would you like us to respond to the true nature of your victory over evil even now in our lives?” — and the prayer that followed it: that the Spirit would come upon them in great power so they could grasp the depth and the height and the width and the breadth of his love, and be filled with hope and conviction of all these things and more.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Genesis 1:1
- John 1:3
- Genesis 1:31
- Colossians 1:16
- Isaiah 14:12–14
- Romans 5
- Genesis 3:22–23
- 1 Timothy 6:16
- Exodus 3:13–14
- Acts 2:22–24
- 1 Corinthians 15:20–26
- Titus 2:11–13
- Revelation 19:9
- John 15:5
- 2 Peter 1:3–4
- Romans 6:4–5

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt argued that God's inability to sin is a strength rather than a limit. Where does your own working picture of freedom still look like “the raw power to act”?
2. If evil has no nature of its own — only good things reduced and twisted — how does that change the way you think about a particular sin you are fighting right now?
3. His students always answer that Adam and Eve were driven out of God's presence. What were they actually kept from, and in what sense was that mercy rather than punishment?
4. “Every moment is borrowed breath.” What would change in an ordinary week if you lived as someone who does not hold his own existence?
5. If your destiny is a person and not a place, what does that do to the way you pray — and what is one thing it changes this 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=cDlj4ECxuvc&t=4226s

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.