

The God of Story, Revelation, and the Exodus | Amy Cogdell

SPEAKER	Amy Cogdell
DATE	Sunday, October 22, 2023
PASSAGES	Deuteronomy 32:3-4; Genesis 15:13-14; Daniel 2:31-45; Revelation 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:9-10; Matthew 16:15-17; Ephesians 1:16-17; Exodus 14:19-20
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:06:53 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God is a storyteller, and he has told us how the story runs. Four times in Scripture he handed a man the outline of an entire age — Abraham, Moses, Daniel, John — so that we would know where we are standing. We are standing in the last chapter, and revelation is not a rare gift for mystics. It is the birthright of every child of God.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Theology interprets story; story does not bend to theology. We are not clever enough to work God out from first principles, so he reveals himself — and he wants to.
- ◆ Revelation means making known what was hidden. You tell your secrets to people you trust, so if you want revelation, become a friend of God.
- ◆ Faith is a response to revelation, and faith grows on continued revelation. Where revelation stops, faith goes stagnant.
- ◆ Personal revelation is revelation with a little r. It guides a life. It is never the basis for doctrine.
- ◆ Four canonical revelations chart four acts: Abraham to the Exodus, the Exodus to the captivity, the captivity to Rome, and Christ's coming to his return.
- ◆ The Rock that shattered the statue in Daniel was already nine times over the hero of the song Moses sang. Clues for reading one chapter sit in the chapter before it.

- ◆ The plagues in Revelation fall the way the plagues in Egypt fell — on the world, not on God's people. Wrath is not our portion; separation is its purpose.
- ◆ The church has not replaced Israel in God's affections. We have been wrapped into a love that was already burning.

► 1:06:53

Amy opened by saying the timing was not hers. She had felt the Lord stirring a message in her seven or eight weeks earlier and decided it would be presumptuous to phone Matt and ask for the pulpit, so she prayed instead. A few days later Matt called her. Then she asked the room to raise a hand if they liked a good story.

1. Theology interprets story — never the other way around

► 1:08:21

We are wired to love stories because we are made in the image of God, and nobody loves a story more than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He designed the whole mystery of human salvation to play out as a drama — tragedy, treachery, wars, defeats, romance, a triumphant ending — and then paid us the honor of writing us into it. Our choices are real. They move his heart or grieve it; they bless people or harm them. And all of them run inside the banks of the great river he is writing.

"We cannot understand the significance of our own lives, and we cannot understand God, apart from story," Amy said. "Theology interprets story, never the other way around." We are not smart enough to figure him out. He is transcendent, he lives in eternity, we live in time — so everything depends on his willingness to disclose himself. Which, she said, is the wonderful part: he wants to be known, he wants to be loved, and he wants to live with us where we can see his face.

2. Revelation is your birthright

► 1:10:23

The word sounds mystical, or apocalyptic, and it is neither. To reveal is to make previously secret information available. You do it constantly — with people you trust. "If you want revelation, you need to become a friend of God. The closer you walk with God, the more revelation you will receive."

Jesus' whole life worked this way. The parables made the kingdom plain. Cleansing the temple revealed the Father's jealousy for a house of prayer for all nations. The cross revealed his love and his justice at

once; the resurrection revealed his intention to live with us forever. Then he sent the Spirit to keep it going — calling his words to mind, convicting of sin, comforting.

► 1:12:40

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him — these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 2:9–10 ↗

“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’”

MATTHEW 16:15–17 ↗

► 1:13:40

Amy's claim was that nearly everyone in the room has had that same revelation. At some point you became convinced Jesus was the Messiah — not because you grew up in church, not because you read it, but because God showed you and your spirit answered. "Faith is a response to revelation, and faith grows with continued revelation. If your revelation does not continue, your faith gets stagnant." Which is why Paul assumes it in the gathering — each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation — and prays for it by name: a Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him. It is also practical enough to redirect an itinerary: "I went up because of a revelation."

3. Little r and capital R

► 1:16:37

Personal revelation is a gift that weaves one life into the big story. Anna and Simeon were in the temple the day Jesus was carried in because of it. Brother Andrew smuggled Bibles into communist Europe on it. Amy's son Noah had one at fifteen — that he would not live his whole life in America — and it worked as a guidepost, a thread that later made sense of things. But it is revelation with a little r, and it is not the basis for doctrine.

Capital-R Revelation is canonical, written into Scripture, and Amy said there are four of it: four men, alongside John, whom she would call revelators, because God showed each of them an entire section of salvation history. "Canonical revelation is like a road map of God's faithfulness."

4. Four chapters

► 1:17:48

The first goes to Abraham, before Isaac exists, before there is a single descendant to be afflicted:

“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years... and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.”

GENESIS 15:13–14 ↗

► 1:18:57

Abraham's vision ran as far as the Exodus, and Moses walks on stage to complete it. Then, at the end of his life, with Israel about to cross over, Moses is handed the second chapter as a song — and it is a disturbing one. It opens on God's tender love and how he drew Israel out, and it ends with idolatry, a refusal to listen, Gentile nations raised up to subdue them, and a captivity from which their hearts finally turn back ([Deuteronomy 32](#)).

► 1:20:13

Judah falls to Babylon in 586 BC, exactly as sung. And there in Babylon God finds a faithful young Jewish man and takes him into his confidence. Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream and later sees his own visions; the symbols differ, the interpretation holds — a succession of kingdoms rising and falling, each subjugating Israel in its turn. Gold head, Babylon. Silver shoulders, Persia. Bronze waist, Greece. Iron legs, Rome. And then a rock cut without hands comes out of nowhere, smashes the feet, and grows until it fills the earth ([Daniel 2:31–45](#)).

► 1:22:57

Much of what Daniel saw baffled him. Amy suspects the rock did not. He was a scholar picking up exactly where Moses left off, and the word *rock* appears nine times in Moses' song:

“Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice... But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked... he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you... How could one have chased a thousand, and two have put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them?”

DEUTERONOMY 32:3–4 ↗, 15–18 ↗, 30 ↗

The lesson she drew from that: clues for interpreting one chapter of history are planted in the chapter before it. "God is the God of symbol and foreshadowing. He knows how to write a good story."

5. This is our chapter, and it is the last one

► 1:24:10

With the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus the fourth act opened. The Rock has struck the statue, and it is still growing across the earth. We know it is the last act because the prophet given to interpret our times is John, and his Revelation addresses the people of God from the ascension to the return.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place... Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear."

REVELATION 1:1-3 ↗

► 1:24:40

As with Abraham, Moses and Daniel, parts of it will only clear up once the story is over. The basic message does not need to wait: the church grows, the church is opposed, our work is patient endurance, and Jesus returns to judge the world, free his people and hold a feast like no other.

6. Galveston

► 1:26:22

Here Amy told her own story, and flagged it carefully as a little r. In 2016 she and her friend Caroline Owens left town for an unstructured weekend of prayer at a borrowed house on the beach. The Lord's presence met them at the threshold "like he had been waiting for us, and like he had an agenda." They dropped the groceries on the porch and fell into prayer.

The agenda turned out to be a thorough inventory of the sins and shames and wounds of her youth — gutting, exhausting, tender, sorrowful in a beautiful way. She kept waking through the night to more of it. In the morning Caroline asked what the Lord was telling her to do, and the answer frightened her: he wanted her to look up at him. Nobody sees the face of God and lives. She waited. Caroline asked again. So she settled on a compromise — she would simply ask him to show her whatever he wanted.

► 1:29:57

She expected the face of Jesus, or a kindly old man with a beard telling her everything was fine. What she saw was a column of flaming fire, red and gold, with eyes in the flames — and she knew it was the pillar that led Israel out of Egypt. "I have never in my life seen anything so beautiful, so holy, so beyond my comprehension. I could not conjure that up. I am not that creative." What astonished her most was the arithmetic of it: *why are you talking to me about my life, when this is who you are? Why do you care about a housewife in Texas?*

► 1:31:19

Her fear of death went that day and has not come back. "At the end of time I am going to see God as he is, and there will be no room for regret. Nothing unsatisfied."

7. "For my bride I part the waters"

► 1:32:36

She went to bed early, slept an hour, and was woken again — tenderly this time. *Amy, come out on the porch with me.* She had never been at the beach at night. A full moon hung low over the water. Then he said it: *for my bride I part the waters.*

► 1:33:23

What followed she described as full panoramic vision. The pillar of fire moving to the rear guard, the eyes shooting warnings out at a terrified Egyptian army ([Exodus 14:19–20](#)). Red and gold light flashing off chariots and off the water — and not only off the surface, because the wind was driving the sea back, so the light danced in the middle of the walls of water. And it flashed off gold, because the Lord had decked his slaves out in necklaces and bracelets like a bride on the night of her deliverance. More than a million people lined up at the sea, and not one of them slept. "There has never been a spectacle like the Exodus on this earth, and there will never be anything that glorious again until the Lord parts the skies and comes for his people. It will be the greater Exodus."

► 1:35:03

Then the vision broke her heart. She heard him say: *I loved Israel like a bride, but she wouldn't look up to me. She couldn't look up to me.* Within weeks that same gold would be melted into a calf ([Exodus 32:1–6](#)). She sat in the living room and wept as she never has before or since — "because I was caught up in God's story and not in my own."

8. What she understood about Israel, and the morning after

► 1:37:04

"To love God is to love what he loves, and to desire what he desires." What he desires, she saw, is that Israel look up and receive him as savior and groom. "The church has not replaced Israel in the Lord's affections. On the contrary — we have been wrapped up into that incredible, passionate love."

► 1:38:45

At five in the morning she went to bed with instructions to walk the beach at six. She was groggy and got up anyway. The sky turned pink, then gold. A man walked past her in the surf, turned back, and said it was a beautiful morning. She agreed, with tears in her eyes. "It's the most beautiful morning of the year," he said — and she knew. She ran back to the house and phoned Thomas, because there was no internet, and asked him to check the calendar. It was Passover. She had known nothing about the Jewish calendar. "The Lord allowed me to keep vigil with him on the anniversary of the day he led Israel out like a groom."

9. Revelation echoes Exodus

► 1:40:41

From her friend Mark Kinzer she learned how closely John's book tracks the book of Exodus, and the parallel is not decoration — it tells you how to read. The plagues of Revelation recall the plagues of Egypt, and those plagues were not sent on Israel.

► 1:41:17

"The wrath of God is not meant for his people. It's meant to separate his people from the world." She was careful not to promise comfort she had not been given: Israel suffered while Egypt suffered, and we will suffer too. But we are not under wrath. The two witnesses who call down plagues should remind you of Moses and Aaron; the woman fleeing into the wilderness should remind you of Israel in the desert. Meditating on the Exodus drives out fear and hands back hope.

10. Seek revelation. It is yours.

► 1:42:22

Amy addressed the young adults directly, and admitted she has been doing this by the shoulders since 2016: "The story is real. It's all real. Hang on. God is going to blow your mind. Become his friend. Seek revelation — it is your birthright."

► 1:43:41

Then a word to the church, taken from the letter to Ephesus — remember your first love, and do the things you did at first. Hope Chapel is a worshipping church, she

said, but somewhere in the last year post-Covid we got slack about showing up on time and slack about pressing in. "We open ourselves up to revelation when we enter into worship." She closed by praying Paul's prayer over the room, asking God to undo the fear of death and to show his beauty, and invited anyone who wanted more revelation to come forward — or, if that felt like too much, to pray where they sat. "He loves shy people too. I'm a shy person."

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- 1 Corinthians 2:9–10
- Matthew 16:15–17
- 1 Corinthians 14:26
- Ephesians 1:16–17
- Galatians 2:1–2
- Luke 2:25–38
- Genesis 15:13–14
- Deuteronomy 32
- Daniel 2:31–45
- Deuteronomy 32:3–4
- Deuteronomy 32:15–18
- Deuteronomy 32:30
- Revelation 1:1–3
- Exodus 14:19–20
- Exodus 32:1–6
- Revelation 11:3–6
- Revelation 12:1–6
- Revelation 2:4–5

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Amy said theology interprets story and never the reverse. Where have you been doing it backwards — holding a conclusion about God that the story of Scripture does not actually support?
2. She defined revelation as what you disclose to people you trust. What does the amount of revelation you are currently receiving suggest about the friendship?
3. Tell the group about a little-r revelation you have been given. What thread of your life has it made sense of since?
4. Knowing we are in the fourth chapter — the Rock growing, the opposition intensifying — how should that change the way you read the news this year?
5. Amy said we have gotten slack about showing up on time and pressing into worship. What is the one thing you did at first that you will start doing again this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Amy Cogdell and her husband Thomas run Christ the Reconciler, a ministry and retreat centre. She is the author of Runaway Bay, a testimony of healing and reconciliation with her father. The Cogdells have been pillars at Hope Chapel and in the Austin House of Prayer community for decades.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3k6gQfzuh4&t=4013s>

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.