What is Man?

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, February 11, 2024
PASSAGES	Psalm 8; Hebrews 2; Psalm 22; Matthew 28
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:11:07 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Psalm 8 stares at the night sky and asks why God would bother with us at all — and then says he crowns us with glory and honor. Hebrews 2 takes that psalm and points at one man: Jesus, crowned with glory because of the suffering of death, tasting it for everyone. He has not handed his job to us and walked away. He is bringing many sons to glory, and he is still here.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- "What is man that you are mindful of him?" is not a lowly-worm apology. It is astonishment that a God of that scale genuinely cares.
- Psalm 8 says everything is under our feet. Hebrews agrees we do not yet see that — and resolves the tension not in humanity subduing the universe but in Jesus.
- God is not insecure about his glory. He can hand glory and honor to human beings without flinching.
- Holy does not mean pure. It means belonging to God — a perfectly good sheep on a hillside is mundane until it is given to him.
- You are not God's good-deeds project. Hebrews calls the church his inheritance and reward; getting you is what he gets out of it.
- The world is held captive by a fear of death, and it leaks out everywhere. Jesus died in order to break that particular grip.

- Jesus never said "I have all authority, therefore I am giving it to you." He said he is with us. No amount of grace or power promotes you into his role as Messiah.
- If the good news sounds like a recruiting speech, something has gone wrong. The honest response to it is relief.

▶ 1:11:07

Matt opened with a report from that morning's experiment in prayer walking — a small group had walked the Brentwood street just outside the building and prayed a blessing over each house. He told an older story from a prayer walk in a store, where a friend sensed that a young woman nearby needed to know God's fatherly love. They said so. Her answer came back immediately: she had just been thinking about her father.

▶ 1:13:17

That tied back to the words spoken earlier in the service about fathers and daughters, and about rebuilding ancient ruins — which might have sounded like a change of subject after a prayer about a dark and anxious world. Matt did not think it was. "God fights in unconventional warfare," he said. Where there are bullets and lies and theft and treachery, God raises up families, restores broken generational lines, and cares not only for the halls of presidents but for the hearts of children.

1. A God who stops for babies

▶ 1:17:17

The message sits inside Hebrews, a book with no known author, no known recipients and no known destination, filed in our Bibles after Paul's letters because some in the early church guessed it was his. What it is unmistakably about is Jesus. And here the writer pauses to meditate on a psalm.

So Matt went to the psalm first. Psalm 8:1–2 sets God's name above the heavens and then, in the same breath, has him establishing strength out of the mouths of babies and infants. Notice what that pairs. "Who — what kind of warlord or chieftain — stops to think about the young?" Majesty and humility in two verses.

> "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor."
>
> PSALM 8:3–5 ↗

2. “What is man?” is not flattery

▶ 1:20:11

Picture a young shepherd outside under a sky with no light pollution — and then add everything David could not see. The stars that are actually galaxies. Dark matter. The unbelievable complexity underneath the world we half-know. God’s name is above all of it.

Which is why Matt insisted the question is not hollow self-deprecation, the *God, I know you’re big, please don’t squish me* reflex. It is a reflection on a God who, out of all that power and depth, cares — and not the way you pity something you pass on the road. David finds that as hard to take in as the sky itself.

Then comes the line worth sitting with: he crowns humanity with glory and honor. “Our project is not to prop him up and make him seem glorious,” Matt said. “He is glorious. He’s not insecure about it one bit, and will actually give glory and honor to humankind without throwing a fit over it.”

3. The tension in the psalm

▶ 1:22:12

The psalm keeps going: dominion over the works of God’s hands, all things under his feet — sheep and oxen, the beasts, the birds, the fish, whatever passes along the paths of the seas (Psalm 8:6–9). The language reaches back to Genesis 1:28.

Matt made the room feel the problem before he solved it. Do you experience dominion over all things? Do you see this glory and honor on us? He was not inventing the discomfort — the writer of Hebrews names it out loud in Hebrews 2:5–7, quoting the psalm with the wonderfully honest citation, “it has been testified somewhere.”

4. “Namely, Jesus”

▶ 1:26:10

> “Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”
>
> HEBREWS 2:8–9 ↗

Watch the pronouns turn. The psalm seemed to be about humanity in general; by verse 9 the writer is talking about one man in the singular, and in case anyone missed it he says the name. Psalm 8 finds its fulfillment not in humanity subduing the universe but in the death and the person of Jesus, who is both God and human — and crowned because of suffering, not in spite of it.

Matt was careful not to let that erase us. It is still about us, he said, but it is being worked out in and through what Jesus is up to.

5. Bringing many sons to glory

▶ 1:27:51

> "For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers."
>
> HEBREWS 2:10–11 ↗

"Perfect through suffering" does not mean Jesus was not good enough until he had bled a little. It means the goal was reached, and the thing he principally suffered was death.

▶ 1:28:58

On *sanctifies*, Matt slowed down to correct a common assumption: holy does not mean pure. It means belonging to the substance and specialness of God. A sheep eating grass on a hillside may be flawless and it is still entirely mundane; give it to God and it is holy. The tongs at a backyard barbecue are ordinary tools; the same tongs in the temple are the Lord's.

And then — not ashamed to call them brothers. "This is not like a humanitarian mission where God puts on his Jesus gloves to touch gross humanity." The writer proves it with the suffering servant's vow, "I will tell of your name to my brothers", spoken in confidence, not embarrassment.

6. You are his reward, not his side project

▶ 1:33:07

Hebrews then borrows Isaiah's words —
"I will put my trust in him," and "Behold, I and the children God has given me" — and puts them in Jesus' mouth. The point is what he counts as his inheritance from his obedience unto death.

"He longs to collect you, to bring you to himself," Matt said. "You might start thinking, well, what does he get out of it? Getting you is what he gets out of it." Not a complex thought. Just a hard one to accept.

7. Death, the devil, and a merciful high priest

▶ 1:33:50

> "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."
>
> HEBREWS 2:14–15 ↗

Nothing about Jesus was sinful, and he took on flesh and blood — which means nothing about needing to eat, sleep, or scratch the back of your head is sinful either. That is simply what it is to be human, along with, because of sin, dying.

The captivity Hebrews names is fear of death, and Matt pointed at where it surfaces: the insane appetite to live forever, the experimental treatments promising two or three hundred years, the culture-wide fixation on youth and vitality.

▶ 1:37:31

> "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."
>
> HEBREWS 2:17–18 ↗

That verb behind *propitiation* shows up in one other place: the tax collector at the back of the temple, too ashamed to lift his eyes, praying "God, be merciful to me, a sinner". Suffering did not make Jesus gruff. Matt reached for the internet joke — Jim Caviezel in full crucifixion makeup, captioned *me explaining to Jesus how hard my morning was* — and then turned it over. Hebrews says the opposite of what the meme says. He does not answer our small trouble with *I had it worse*. He flexes mercy. "God's patience isn't just duty. It's driven by desire."

8. He did not throw us the keys and leave

▶ 1:39:15

Here Matt named the distortion he was preaching against, and put himself in it: men like him telling the church a version of the Great Commission where Jesus says *I got all authority, now I'm giving it to you, sorry boys, I'll see you in a couple of millennia* — and tosses over the keys to the company car on his way out.

> "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me… And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
>
> MATTHEW 28:18–20 ↗

He never said he was handing it over. He said he would be with us — and by the Spirit he is with us in more places at once than he could be in Galilee. "That's why it's good for the church to know the Bible too, so screwy men like me don't just mess you up."

9. Which Christianity are you in

▶ 1:41:55

The alternative, Matt said, is *Weekend at Bernie's* Christianity — a frantic adventure propping up someone who is not actually alive so the vacation can continue. It shows up in the grim version, where Jesus asks whether you have what it takes and expects a fat return on his investment, and in the charismatic version, where the fix is getting powered up enough. Both forget that Jesus mocked people who tie up heavy burdens and will not lift a finger. You can fulfill the calling God gave you by his grace, Matt said — but there is no amount of grace or power that promotes you into the role of Messiah.

▶ 1:43:56

So why is it called good news if it sounds so terrible? Because it is actually good news. We do not manufacture God's glory or make sure everyone notices it — the knowledge of his glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. In Acts the word does its own spreading, increasing and multiplying, whether or not you lend it your mouth. He is still the savior of the world, still holds all authority, still glorious, still with his church. "We are not desperately in a panic creating his kingdom for him without him, hoping he likes it."

Underneath the argument, Matt said, is a plain question: do you believe Jesus is real and glorious, or not? If he is only an idea, then the idea does depend on you, and you had better get in there. If he is not, the honest reaction to the gospel is relief.

▶ 1:46:44

He ended by asking the congregation to stand while he prayed that God would knock the *Weekend at Bernie's* nonsense off of us, renew the joy of the gospel, give a lightness and gladness to our faith, help us take up the light yoke, and let us repent of the weight of the Christ complex.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Psalm 8:1–2
- Psalm 8:3–5
- Genesis 1:28
- Psalm 8:6–9
- Hebrews 2:5–7
- Hebrews 2:8–9
- Hebrews 2:10–11
- Psalm 22:22
- Isaiah 8:17–18
- Hebrews 2:14–15
- Hebrews 2:17–18
- Luke 18:13
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Matthew 23:4
- Habakkuk 2:14
- Acts 12:24
- Matthew 11:30

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Read Psalm 8:3–5 slowly. Where does your gut land — closer to “don’t squish me,” or closer to “he crowns us with glory and honor,” and why?
2. Hebrews admits we do not yet see everything in subjection to us. Where do you feel that gap most in your own life right now?
3. Matt said the hardest thing to accept is that you are Jesus’ reward rather than his good-deeds project. What in you resists that?
4. Where does the fear of death show up in your life, and what would it look like to be delivered from it rather than distracted from it?
5. Which version of Christianity have you been living in this year — the one where you prop him up, or the one where he is with you? Name one habit or assumption you will drop 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=igJMwQ6MSe0&t=4267s

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.