

Gospel of Glory: the Prologue

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, August 25, 2024
PASSAGES	John 1; Genesis 1; Psalm 33; Psalm 85; Exodus 34; Exodus 29
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:34:31 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Before John reports a single thing Jesus said or did, he tells you what it means. The Word who spoke creation into being came into his own world, and his own world did not grasp him — and he became flesh anyway. That is not a self-improvement project. It is God speaking light into darkness for the sake of his own glory.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The prologue is the best commentary on John that exists. It is written by the same author, and it puts the significance in front of the story rather than behind it.
- ◆ John calls Jesus “the Word” only here. From the moment the Word becomes flesh, the title is retired and the focus shifts to the Son who reveals the Father.
- ◆ The Genesis echo is not decoration. If the Creator is the one arriving, then the rejection later in the gospel becomes a tragedy rather than a misunderstanding.
- ◆ “Did not grasp,” “did not know,” “did not receive” — the parallel language suggests the darkness was not passive. We preferred it.
- ◆ Being given the *right to become* children of God is meaningless if we already were by default. By default we are born of blood, of flesh, of the will of man.
- ◆ “Dwelt among us” is the tent word — the same accommodation God made at the tabernacle so that he could be their God and they could be his people.

- ◆ Jesus is the initiator. He speaks first, comes first, and accomplishes what he intends through our resistance rather than despite needing our cooperation.

► 1:34:31

Matt opened a new series through the Gospel according to John by starting where John himself starts — not at a manger, not at a baptism, but at a sentence about eternity. His argument for giving a whole morning to eighteen verses was simple: the introduction to John is one of the best commentaries on John you will ever find.

Three reasons the prologue is strange

► 1:34:57

First, the vocabulary. This is the only place in the gospel where Jesus is called the Word. Second, the poetry — a ladder structure, where the last word of one line becomes the first word of the next, which is easy to miss when you read quickly. Third, the tone-setting. Matt described the book as a masterpiece both literary and theological, layered enough that new depth surfaces every time through — which he offered as indirect evidence that the Holy Spirit was helping men the world considered uneducated.

► 1:36:48

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

JOHN 1:1-5 ↗

So the main character is with God, is God, and is the one through whom everything was made. Nothing was made outside of him. And the verb in verse 5 is unsettled — *grasp*, *overcome*, sometimes a footnote offering *understood*. Matt left it open and promised clues later in the passage.

Genesis, on purpose

► 1:38:57

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep... And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.”

GENESIS 1:1–4 ↗

► 1:39:44

Beginnings, light, darkness, speech, making. John is certainly saying that Jesus is God — but Matt pressed on *why* he says it this way. You would expect creation to recognize its maker. Setting that expectation is what turns the later rejection into drama: the Creator comes to his own people, and they will not have him. It also establishes Jesus as the initiator and the source, which Matt called part of the great relief of the Gospels — the mission is his activity, and he is competent to do everything he intends.

What the Psalms were already saying

► 1:41:20

The same cluster of words shows up in the Psalms. [Psalm 33:4–7](#) has the word of the Lord upright, his work done in faithfulness, the heavens made by that word and their host by the breath of his mouth. We know Jesus as a man; John is saying that this eternal Word — the one associated with the grand power of creation — is what became flesh.

► 1:42:48

“Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints... Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.”

PSALM 85:8–10 ↗

Matt lingered on verse 9: salvation comes *that glory may dwell*. Glory is a heavy theme in this gospel, and here is one of the reasons God speaks and saves at all. And notice the response — a symphony rising off the ground and looking down from the sky, all of it triggered by God’s mouth.

Two introductions, side by side

► 1:44:39

Then John the Baptist arrives, and [John 1:6–8](#) introduces him with three modest facts: a man, sent, a witness — and explicitly not the light. If you had stood in the crowd hearing both men preach, Matt suggested, you might have filed them together as impressive prophet types. The text will not let you. One is a witness. The other made everything that was made.

► [1:45:53](#)

And then the turn. [John 1:9–11](#): he was in the world, the world was made through him, and the world did not know him; he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. Set that against the psalm, where God speaks and creation answers in beauty. Here God speaks and enters, and what answers back is blindness and deafness. Mountains and trees and inanimate things of every kind cry out his praise, Matt noted, and yet our own Creator arrives and it seems we would rather have the dark.

That is also the clue he had promised. The world did not know him, his own did not receive him, the darkness did not grasp him — three parallel refusals. Whatever the translators settle on, the sense is the same: we did not get it, and we did not want it.

The right to become

► [1:47:11](#)

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

JOHN 1:12–14 ↗

Matt pushed on the word *become*. It is a meaningless gift if we are all already God’s children by default. What we are by default is stated plainly — born of blood, of the will of the flesh, of the will of man. “I know that’s not the most affirming thing you could hear, and that’s kind of our vibe right now,” he said, “but it’s true. We often think very highly of ourselves.”

► [1:48:34](#)

Which sets up the exchange in verse 14. The eternal Word, God by default and full of glory, becomes what he was not — flesh — so that we who are flesh by default can become what he is by nature: glorious children of God.

Grace and truth, and a tent

► 1:49:55

“Full of grace and truth” is not a new phrase. It is what God said about himself when Moses asked to know him — [Exodus 34:6](#), merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, where that last word is just as often rendered *truth*. It echoes again in [Psalm 86:15](#). Jesus reflects perfectly the God Israel had been worshiping the whole time.

► 1:52:00

Then the tabernacle. In [Exodus 29:43](#) God goes out of his way to make a place to meet with Israel, sanctified by his glory, so that they would know he is their God and they are his people and he lives among them. The Greek word for that tent, turned into a verb, is exactly the word in [John 1:14](#). The Word became flesh and *tented* among us — the same accommodation, made again, so that we could know him and belong to him. And that verse is the last time John calls him the Word. From here on, the focus is the Son who reveals the Father.

The only God, at the Father’s side

► 1:53:46

In [John 1:15](#) the Baptist insists that the one coming after him ranks before him, because he was before him. In the flesh Jesus was the younger of the two. John is talking about the Ancient of Days.

► 1:54:21

“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

JOHN 1:16–18 ↗

Matt admitted he is bad at diagramming sentences and that this one is a nightmare, then slowed it down. No one has seen God — a settled Old Testament theme. Yet the only God, the one at the Father’s side, has made him known. The only person that sentence can be describing is the eternal Word made flesh. Seeing and knowing Jesus is not a hypothetical route to the Father; it is seeing and knowing the only God.

Not a life hack

► 1:56:21

Matt gathered it up before a word of the story has been told: God speaks, his word creates, his light shines in darkness, he speaks peace instead of folly, and he brings salvation to people who do not deserve it — for the point of glory.

► 1:58:43

“This is not a movement of people who want to be slightly better than they were yesterday,” he said. “This isn’t sweetness radicalized into a religion.” John is setting the tone in a completely different direction — there was dumb, stupid darkness, foolish and confused, and God spoke. And when the light came, Matt included himself in what happened next: we rejected it, spit at it, mocked it, arrested it, pierced it. All of which turned out to be the means of accomplishing exactly what he intended, “because he’s coming for his bride, and his goodness is running after you.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [John 1:1–5](#)
- [Genesis 1:1–4](#)
- [Psalm 33:4–7](#)
- [Psalm 85:8–10](#)
- [John 1:6–8](#)
- [John 1:9–11](#)
- [John 1:12–14](#)
- [Exodus 34:6](#)
- [Psalm 86:15](#)
- [Exodus 29:43](#)
- [John 1:15](#)
- [John 1:16–18](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. John tells you the meaning before he tells you the story. What changes about how you read the rest of this gospel knowing that?
2. Matt said creation should have recognized its maker. Where do you see the world around you answering God the way Psalm 85 describes, and where do you see the refusal of John 1:11?
3. Verse 12 offers the right to become children of God. How do you react to being told that you are not one by default?
4. The Word tented among us — the same accommodation God made at the tabernacle. What does it do to you that God keeps making room to be near people who did not ask him to?
5. Matt insisted this is not a self-improvement project but light crashing into darkness. Where have you been treating your faith as a life hack, and what would you do differently 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=RfZc7RMKxJY&t=5671s>

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.