Gospel of Glory: Signs and Structure

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, September 1, 2024
PASSAGES	Isaiah 7; Isaiah 38; Isaiah 52; Isaiah 53; John 2; John 6; John 8; John 12
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:00:00 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

John did not stack his miracles up at random. He borrowed Isaiah's shape — six, maybe seven signs of God's power to save, and then a suffering servant through whom every covenant promise is kept. Read it that way and the cross stops looking like the place the story went wrong. It is the seventh sign, and Jesus called it glory.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The first half of Isaiah hands out six, maybe seven signs, and every one of them is God showing frightened people that he has the power to deliver them.
- The second half turns to covenant promises kept — and they hinge on the obedience and the suffering of one man God simply calls his servant.
- John's gospel has the same two halves in the same order. He quotes Isaiah, he introduces John the Baptist in Isaiah's words, and he describes the cross with Isaiah's vocabulary.
- "Lifted up" carries two meanings at once: a body nailed to wood and stood upright in the ground, and Isaiah's throne, high and exalted. Jesus meant both.
- The seven signs sit in matched layers — a dying boy against a raised dead man, a disabled man against a disabled man, wine at a wedding against wine and water at a cross — with the multiplied bread in the middle.
- The middle layer is the key to the rest: Jesus is not the one who hands out bread, he is the bread of heaven.
- The literary genius is not the point. John wrote so that his readers would believe, and knowing about the bread of heaven is not the same as eating.

▶ 1:08:40

Hope Chapel is at the beginning of a study in the gospel according to John, and Matt admitted he was still not quite past the introduction. There are things about this gospel that are impossible to see up close — the seven times Jesus says "I am," the seven more where he says what he is. This week he wanted the bird's-eye view of one pattern in particular, which meant starting somewhere other than John. "One of my goals is to show how beautiful scripture is," Matt said, "how the Holy Spirit clearly helped this man write this document."

1. The quickest tour of Isaiah you will ever get

▶ 1:10:29

Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem before the exile, warning Judah about her rebellion and about Babylon. The first thirty-nine chapters read as a long collection of warnings that culminate in that prediction. Around chapter 40 most readers feel the book turn a corner: the subject becomes God bringing his people home and keeping every covenant promise. Some scholars find the shift so sharp they posit a

second author. Matt was unimpressed — "You ever written two different emails on different days and they sound different? It's not that big of a deal."

▶ 1:12:19

What matters is what fills that first half: a run of things Isaiah calls *signs*. Ahaz is besieged by Syria and Israel, God tells Isaiah to go comfort him, and Ahaz piously refuses to ask for anything.

> "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."
>
> ISAIAH 7:11–14 ↗

Most of us meet that verse at Christmas. Matt thinks it carries a double meaning: a child born in Ahaz's own lifetime was a sign to a scared king that God had the power to save him. The rest run the same way. Isaiah and his children are themselves signs and portents in Israel. Egypt gets an altar that is "a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts", and a savior sent to a people crying out under oppressors.

▶ 1:14:34

With Assyria invading, Judah gets a sign in the harvest — eat what grows of itself this year, and plant vineyards in the third. When Hezekiah is dying and weeping, the shadow on the dial goes backward ten steps. And then, at the end of that same chapter, Hezekiah asks "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" and the chapter simply stops. No answer. Six signs, maybe seven, depending on how you count — and every one of them God proving he can rescue.

2. And then a servant

▶ 1:16:58

After the corner turns, the hope of restoration gathers around one obedient individual.

> "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you — his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance — so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand."
>
> ISAIAH 52:13–15 ↗

▶ 1:17:44

> "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
>
> ISAIAH 53:4–6 ↗

Matt let the date do the work: hundreds of years before a Roman cross existed.

---

3. John has plainly read this scroll

▶ 1:19:32

The evidence is not subtle. John reaches the end of Jesus' public ministry and reaches for Isaiah twice in three verses:

> "Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'"
>
> JOHN 12:37–40 ↗

The second quotation is Isaiah 6:10, about blinded eyes and hardened hearts, which pricks a lot of consciences. Matt's reading: judgment had already been settled, so God was freezing people in the hard-heartedness they had already chosen — and deliverance came out the other side of it. Something similar is running in Jesus' own day. God is not going to soften every heart around his Son and leave nobody willing to crucify him.

▶ 1:21:16

John also thinks in Isaiah's language. Asked who he is, the Baptist answers
"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness" — a line lifted from Isaiah 40, the exact hinge where the book turns toward hope.

▶ 1:22:55

Then the phrase that decides everything. Jesus says
"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he". On one level that is grotesque and shameful: a man nailed to wood and the wood dropped into a hole. But Isaiah saw the

Lord "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up", and Isaiah's servant is "high and lifted up, and shall be exalted" in the same breath that describes him marred beyond recognition. Jesus is not being brave about the cross. He is calling it his glory.

4. Six signs, maybe seven

▶ 1:24:44

Now count John's. Water into wine at a wedding, and the best saved for last (John 2:1–11). A boy healed who is not merely sick but, in the Greek, about to die (John 4:46–54). A paralyzed man at a pool (John 5:1–9). Bread multiplied for thousands (John 6:1–14). A blind man given sight (John 9:1–7). A dead man called out of a tomb (John 11:38–44). Six.

▶ 1:26:27

Readers hunting the seventh have nominated the walking on water, the anointing at Bethany, the foot washing, the miraculous catch. Matt's objection is procedural: John never calls any of those a sign. "You have to play John's word game first and then see what he's doing with it. We don't want to just mess with the rules." The seventh is sitting in chapter two, where the temple clearing provokes a demand:

> "So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'" … But he was speaking about the temple of his body.
>
> JOHN 2:18–21 ↗

▶ 1:28:52

The sign is not the whip and the overturned tables. The sign is a body killed and raised — which means the seventh sign is only legible once you have read the second half of the book. Same structure as Isaiah, same ambiguity in the count, same hinge. Matt paused on the oddity of that coming from a fisherman: John writes the simplest Greek in the New Testament and buries Shakespearean machinery in it. All four gospels report the multiplied loaves; only John mentions they were *barley*, which quietly puts Jesus beside Elisha feeding a hundred men with twenty barley loaves — far more bread, far fewer mouths. "John, that's the subtlest hint ever."

5. The sandwich

▶ 1:29:53

Lay the seven out and they pair off from the outside in, the way ancient writers liked to build. The dying boy matches the raised dead man — which is why John bothered to tell us the child was at the point of death. The paralyzed man matches the blind man. The wedding wine matches the crucifixion, where Jesus is given sour wine and water runs from his opened side; the connection of wine and blood is not one Matt invented, it is the one Jesus made at the table.

▶ 1:31:29

That leaves the multiplied bread alone in the middle, which in this arrangement is the layer that explains the rest. And Jesus does not let the bread stay bread.

> "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."
>
> JOHN 6:57–58 ↗

6. Why he arranged it this way

▶ 1:32:40

Because Jesus is glorious, and John spends a whole book trying to get us to see it. He is the exalted suffering servant who acts wisely; he is high and lifted up, and there was no shame in it. Through that, healing and deliverance. And notice where both ends of the sandwich land: a crucifixion that opens the marriage supper of the Lamb, and a ministry that opened at a wedding with an absurd quantity of the best wine anyone there had tasted. Both say the same thing about God's provision: it is extravagant, and it saves the best for last. You are invited to that supper.

Last word

▶ 1:34:41

Matt intends to teach the series along this structure, because he thinks it is the one John built. Then he set the whole thing down. "In another way, who cares? … I want you to see what John saw. A glorious risen Lord." The literary intricacy is worth admiring and it is not the reason the book exists; John wrote so that people would believe. "I am the bread of life" is a fact you can hold at arm's length. Our forefathers ate manna, Matt said — miraculous stuff, and they still died. "It's kind of neat to know about that. But it's way neater knowing it personally."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Isaiah 7:11–14
- Isaiah 8:18
- Isaiah 19:20
- Isaiah 37:30
- Isaiah 38:7–8
- Isaiah 38:21–22
- Isaiah 52:13–15
- Isaiah 53:4–6
- John 12:37–40
- Isaiah 6:10
- John 1:23
- Isaiah 40:1–3
- John 8:28
- Isaiah 6:1
- John 2:1–11
- John 4:46–54
- John 5:1–9
- John 6:1–14
- John 9:1–7
- John 11:38–44
- John 2:18–21
- 2 Kings 4:42–44
- John 6:57–58
- Revelation 19:9
- John 6:35

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt spent nearly half the message in Isaiah before he opened John. What did the older pattern change about the way you read the gospel?
2. Isaiah's signs are all God proving he can rescue frightened people. Which of John's seven signs have you found hardest to read that way?
3. Jesus called being lifted up on a cross his glory. Where do you still see the cross as shame that God worked around rather than the moment he meant?
4. The middle of the sandwich is Jesus as the bread of heaven, not the one who hands bread out. What difference does that distinction make to how you come to him?
5. Matt said knowing about the bread of heaven is not the same as knowing him personally. What is one thing you will do this week to close that gap?

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=mpto-uX0_Q8&t=0s

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.