

Gospel of Glory: Signs of God Himself at Work

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, September 22, 2024
PASSAGES	John 2; John 5; John 9; Job 33; Genesis 2
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:55:31 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Both of these healings are set up as arguments about power — where it comes from, who controls it, and whether a person can get hold of it without getting hold of God. Jesus' answer is that there is no such thing. When he works, the Father is working. Which makes how you receive Jesus the same thing as how you receive God.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ John does not call every miracle a sign. He is playing a deliberate game with the word, and following it changes what you see — the first sign is water into wine, and Matt argues the last one is the crucifixion.
- ◆ The man at the pool answers “Do you want to be healed?” with a complaint about queueing. His hope is in a power he thinks is impersonal, arbitrary, and first-come-first-served.
- ◆ The leaders never dispute that the healing happened. Their objection is a scheduling objection — which tells you what they think God's power is.
- ◆ “My Father is working until now, and I am working” is not a dodge. It is the claim that detonates the whole argument, and they understood it perfectly.
- ◆ Jesus makes mud out of dirt and spit, in a culture that believed every human being was formed from clay. He is not performing a technique; he is painting a picture of who he is.
- ◆ If Jesus' works are God's works, then hating Jesus' ministry while claiming to love God is not a coherent position — and that, more than the Sabbath, is what is driving the Pharisees mad.

- ◆ The warning runs both directions: away from tarot cards and manifesting, and away from a Christian version of the same thing, where prayer and study and fasting are worked like a mechanism rather than done with a person.

► 0:55:31

Matt has been working through the Gospel of John by following the shape John gave it rather than the chapter numbers — specifically, which miracles John bothers to call signs. This week was a pair: two men healed, two Sabbath arguments, and one question running underneath both of them that has almost nothing to do with medicine.

How John counts

► 0:56:26

Jesus does a great deal of miraculous work in this gospel, but John reserves the word *sign*. The first one is water into wine. The last one, on Matt's reading — he conceded up front that it is not the popular view — is the crucifixion itself. The crucifixion is never labelled a sign at the moment it happens, but it is labelled one in advance: when the leaders demand a sign in the temple, Jesus answers "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

► 0:57:30

The signs are then arranged in what Matt calls a sandwich — "that's not the technical term for it, but that's what I'm calling it." The first matches the last, the second matches the second-to-last, and so on inward, with the middle one interpreting the whole. Today's two are a matched pair, and the point of reading them together is that neither is simply a story about a healer.

The man who had been waiting thirty-eight years

► 0:58:38

By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, and around it a crowd of blind, lame and paralyzed people, all waiting for the water to be stirred. One of them has been an invalid for thirty-eight years (John 5:5–9).

“When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.’”

JOHN 5:6-7 ↗

► 1:00:40

Matt was careful with that answer, because it is a strange one. It is a yes, but it arrives as a complaint about access. The man wants to be healed; he cannot get to the front of the line, and by the time he arrives the power has run out. John is not endorsing the folklore about the water. He is showing us where this man’s hope actually sits: in something arbitrary, impersonal, and detached from God — a power that can be exploited by whoever is quickest.

“Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.’”

JOHN 5:8-10 ↗

The question they did not ask

► 1:01:19

“The Jews” here means the Jewish leaders — you can tell from the context. And notice what they do not say. Not *how are you suddenly walking*. Not *what happened to you*. Not even *it is good to see you on your feet*. When they finally do ask a question, it is

“Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” — not who healed you, not how, but who told you that you could carry that.

► 1:03:39

Matt pushed back on reading them as villains for the sake of villains. Something more specific is going on. They are not saying the healing was faked. The man was genuinely paralyzed, his neighbours knew it, and he is walking around in front of them ([John 5:14-16](#)). The parallel in [Luke 13:10-17](#) makes the logic plain: the synagogue ruler tells the crowd there are six other days to come and be healed. “If he thought this was demonic, he should have said, guys, this is demonic, don’t come at all.” Telling people to come back tomorrow only makes sense if you believe it really is God’s power — being used on the wrong day, without permission.

“My Father is working until now”

► 1:06:34

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working.’”

JOHN 5:17 ↗

That is the sentence that turns the healing into an argument, and it is why the dialogue is not an appendix to the story. “This isn’t an exploitation of power,” Matt said. “This isn’t like the force. What Jesus is saying is, God himself is involved here.”

► 1:07:52

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”

JOHN 5:19 ↗

Which lands them somewhere they cannot go. If the works of Jesus are the works of God, and they hate the works of Jesus — his fame, his miracles, his ministry — then they are confronted with the possibility that what they actually hate is God himself. Matt noted how much sharper the rest of the chapter gets from there:

you do not have his word abiding in you, you do not have the love of God within you, and if you really believed Moses and the prophets, you would not have killed Jesus who is the Son of God. Only after all of that does John call the healing a sign — which is his way of telling you to take the miracle, the reaction and the sermon as one piece.

The sister story, and a handful of mud

► 1:10:30

“As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.’”

JOHN 9:1-3 ↗

Same themes, arriving from a different angle. The disciples want the formula — what input produced this output? And one reason people want to know how a thing works, Matt pointed out, is so they can work it. Jesus refuses the mechanism and promises a display instead.

► 1:11:30

“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

JOHN 9:4-5 ↗

Note the order. He says he is the light of the world, and then he hands a blind man a pair of eyes. The claim comes first; the miracle is the illustration.

► 1:11:46

Then he spits on the ground, makes mud, anoints the man’s eyes, and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam — which, John stops to tell you, means “sent”. The sent one sends him, and he comes back seeing.

► 1:12:25

Remember what Adam was made of — dust from the ground, animated by the breath of God — and Eve out of Adam’s rib, which means she comes out of the dirt too, at one remove. And it was not only the two of them. There was a widespread belief that every person is formed individually from clay. Matt gave one example rather than an exhausting list, from Elihu’s speech to Job:

► 1:13:32

“Behold, I am toward God as you are; I too was pinched off from a piece of clay.”

JOB 33:6 ↗

“That’s just poetic language,” Matt said — “or is it?” Clay and spittle turn up all over the literature of the period, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, as the stuff human beings are made from. So the mud is not a technique. It is a self-portrait. The Creator, in the flesh, kneeling in the dirt to give a man a brand-new pair of eyes. And if you were tempted to try the recipe at home, Matt had an answer ready for when it would work: when God himself is the one doing it.

Everyone gets a turn to react

► 1:15:34

The neighbours argue about whether it is even the same man, and then finally ask the obvious thing: “Then how were your eyes opened?” and, better still, “Where is he?” “Now we’re cooking,” Matt said. It is not faith yet, but it is interest in the person — which is exactly what the leaders in the first story never showed.

► 1:16:43

Then he is brought to the Pharisees, and it was a Sabbath when the mud was made. “You sense the tension building. You sense the repeat of all the same themes.” Every question from the first story arrives again at once — how does God work, is he at work, when may you use his power, can you use it without his permission — and the room splits down the middle over it (John 9:13–16): “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath,” against “How can a man who is a sinner do such things?” “And there was a division among them.”

Matt asked the room to picture it from inside: this is the best day of the man’s life, he is seeing faces for the first time, and everyone with authority is furious with him. They are angry at him, in effect, for having received grace.

► 1:18:41

And he named what that division is protecting. If Jesus is using God’s power without God’s permission, they get to go on saying “yeah, yeah, we love God, but we don’t like this guy.” If it is with permission, they have to admit they were wrong about him — and see themselves for who they really are. “It’s way bigger than Jesus can heal.” That is what is driving them crazy, and the Sabbath is only the presentable version of it.

► 1:19:15

Asked straight out what he makes of the man who did this, the beggar gives the first of three escalating answers: “He is a prophet.” Hold onto that; by the end of the chapter it will have climbed twice more.

► 1:19:51

His parents are called in and answer with a lawyer’s care — he is of age, ask him — because confessing Jesus as the Christ meant being put out of the synagogue. Matt read their reply as barely concealed panic: can we go now? Are we free to leave?

► 1:21:02

The man himself is less careful, and much funnier.

“Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” — and then, “Do you” Matt loved that line, and drew the obvious inference from how hard they are circling: they are so fixated on Jesus that the question is not entirely unfair.

► 1:22:04

“You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.” Matt sent us straight back to the first story, where Jesus told these same men that if they really believed Moses they would believe him. Their proudest credential is the one he had already taken off them — “meaning they aren’t actually.”

► 1:23:41

“Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

JOHN 9:32–34 ↗

Every phrase of that is a fresh stab, because it dismantles the one position they have left. They cannot deny the power, so they have assumed it is being used without God’s approval — and a beggar has just pointed out that God does not hand his power to sinners to misuse. So they throw him out, on the grounds that he was born in utter sin, which is precisely the theory Jesus rejected in the first three verses of the chapter.

► 1:25:35

Jesus goes and finds him (John 9:35–39), and the third answer arrives — “Lord, I believe” — and the man who was born in the dark ends the chapter worshipping.

“Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.’”

JOHN 9:39 ↗

What it costs us to get this wrong

► 1:27:04

The man at the pool, the leaders and the Pharisees all made the same mistake in different keys: they treated God’s power as detachable from his will — sitting impersonally in the water, or applied impersonally on the wrong day. Jesus’ actions are God’s actions, bound up in the one will of Father, Son and Spirit.

On the negative side, Matt was blunt: don’t walk, run from tarot cards, psychics, horoscopes and magic — anywhere you go looking for power or knowledge with God’s personal involvement removed. “We should ask for his power among us. But if it is among us, it’s a sign that he is personally among us and that he is at work. And if it weren’t so, we shouldn’t even want it. I don’t trust us to wield it.”

► 1:27:49

And then the harder half, because there are Christian versions of the same instinct. “Let that be a warning to us,” he said, “to not study or pray or do good deeds and fast in such a way that is impersonally detached from Jesus the person. How we react to him is how we react to God.” We can read the story closely, notice a clever little parallel between two chapters — “oh, that’s so neat” — and be no better off. “Who cares. What really matters is, how do you receive Jesus?” The question the signs put to the reader is the same one they put to everyone standing there.

► 1:29:06

People do object that it seems unfair for Jesus to be the only name under heaven by which we must be saved. Matt’s answer came out of the story: Jesus is God, and of course God is the only way to God. Every other route is the man by the pool — always too late, never quick enough, “I can’t make it work.” Karma, good deeds, sending the right energy out to the universe and waiting for it to come back. Someone in the room supplied the current word for it: manifesting. (“Okay — thanks, Peter.”) Repent of that too, he said, and of seeking God through your own virtue, and of anything at all that keeps relationship with him at a distance instead of at the core — because Christianity at its core is an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb, to knowing him personally, adopted into God’s family, knowing God as Father and friend and bridegroom. “And how we respond to that makes all the difference in the world.”

► 1:30:37

He prayed that God would till the soil of our hearts, that we would be good soil — uproot, plant, tear down and build up to his heart’s content — and asked for the one thing the whole morning had been about: “Help us to receive you well.” Then, finding he had finished early, he invited the Heart Ministry teams forward and gave the rest of the hour to prayer.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [John 2:19](#)
- [John 5:5–9](#)
- [John 5:6–7](#)
- [John 5:8–10](#)
- [John 5:11–13](#)
- [John 5:14–16](#)
- [Luke 13:10–17](#)
- [John 5:17](#)
- [John 5:19](#)
- [John 5:38–47](#)
- [John 9:1–3](#)
- [John 9:4–5](#)
- [John 9:6–7](#)
- [Genesis 2:7](#)
- [Genesis 2:21–22](#)
- [Job 33:6](#)
- [John 9:8–12](#)
- [John 9:13–16](#)
- [John 9:17](#)
- [John 9:18–23](#)
- [John 9:24–29](#)
- [John 9:32–34](#)
- [John 9:35–39](#)
- [John 9:39](#)
- [Acts 4:12](#)
- [Revelation 19:9](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. The man at the pool answered “Do you want to be healed?” by explaining why he keeps missing his turn. Where do you find yourself explaining the mechanism instead of asking Jesus?
2. The leaders could not deny the healing, so they questioned the timing. What does that tell you about what they believed God’s power was — and where do you catch the same assumption in yourself?
3. Matt said Jesus making mud from dirt was a self-portrait, not a technique. What difference does it make to read the miracle that way rather than as a method?
4. He warned about the Christian version of exploiting God’s power — praying, studying, fasting and serving in a way that is detached from Jesus the person. Which of your practices is most at risk of that right now?
5. If Jesus at work means God personally at work, what would change this week in how you ask him for something?

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=fS7ZJ2N26p0&t=3331s>

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.