Gospel of Glory: I AM … He Said

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, October 13, 2024
PASSAGES	John 4; John 6; John 8; John 13; John 18; Exodus 3
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:10:45 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Across John's Gospel Jesus keeps dropping two plain Greek words into his sentences — *ego eimi*, I am — and they are the name God gave Moses at the bush. The people most equipped to recognize it reached for stones. Which is why the question is not whether you would have believed had you been there, but what you are doing with him now.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- "It is I; do not be afraid" is, in the Greek, simply *I am*. Jesus says it while walking on water — something the Old Testament reserves for God alone.
- Jesus does not merely re-enact Israel's story of crossing the sea. He crosses it the way the God who parted it does: on foot, on top of the water.
- In John 8 the tension is built by repetition. Three times he says "I am," and only on the third do they finally hear what he has been saying and pick up stones.
- Being Abraham's offspring was never the point. Abraham's work was believing God, so the way to do what Abraham did is to believe the one standing in front of you.
- Jesus was not relationally severed from the Father at the cross. "He has not left me alone" is his own account of it, and it was for joy that he went.
- The men who wanted him dead were the respected ones who saw themselves as the good guys. That is the cautionary tale — assuming you are the good guy is itself the danger.

- Jesus and the Father are not good cop and bad cop. Anything you believe about the Father that is not true of the Son is not true at all.

▶ 1:10:45

Matt got to the front having been caught off guard twice inside five minutes — once by the worship set ending sooner than he expected, once by learning from the congregation that it was Pastor Appreciation Day. He apologized for the vacant expression, mentioned Wednesday's congregational meeting, and then picked the series back up in the Gospel of John.

Where the series had gotten to

▶ 1:12:02

The previous week covered seven metaphors Jesus uses of himself — bread of life, light of the world, the gate for the sheep, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the true vine. Shepherd was a standard title for kings across the ancient world, back at least to Hammurabi, and the Old Testament used it of Israel's own priests and kings, who, as Matt put it, "often gorged themselves instead of taking care of the sheep." Jesus is the good one, at his own life's expense.

The vine was likewise a stock picture of Israel herself. In Psalm 80:8–17 God brings a vine out of Egypt, plants it, sends out its branches — and then the psalmist asks why its walls are broken down, before praying an unexpected line: let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself. Jesus is the true vine, and anyone can be planted into him.

1. To a woman at a well

▶ 1:13:20

The room had just sung about a well that never runs dry, which made the first scene land: John 4:16–26. Jesus tells a woman about the five husbands, and she answers, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." Matt was careful with her: she is not wrong, and it is a reasonable place to start. But the conversation is about his identity, and there is more. When she says the Messiah will explain everything, he drops it on her — *I who speak to you am he.*

2. On the water, in the dark

▶ 1:14:53

> "When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.'"
>
> JOHN 6:16–20 ↗

▶ 1:16:03

Jesus crosses a sea, as Israel did. But he does it alone, on foot, on top of the water — and Job says of God that he alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea. "Kind of a Yahweh thing to do," Matt said. And the reassurance he calls out over the water is, in the Greek, not "it is I" but simply *I am*.

▶ 1:17:23

> "Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to you."'"
>
> EXODUS 3:13–14 ↗

▶ 1:18:09

Mark's account adds that he meant to pass by them, which reads like avoidance until you notice how the phrase is used elsewhere — the Lord passing by Elijah at the mouth of the cave, or passing his goodness in front of Moses. Passing by is how God draws near.

3. In the temple: "unless you believe that I am"

▶ 1:19:33

If this is the God of Israel in the flesh, you would expect his own people to receive him gladly. John 8:12–19 is where that expectation breaks. He is the light of the world; they answer that a man's testimony about himself does not count; he says the Father testifies too; they ask where his father is — possibly, Matt suggested, leaning on rumors about his birth.

> "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."
>
> JOHN 8:23–24 ↗

▶ 1:20:40

Two chapters earlier, believing in him was described as eating the bread that came down from heaven — different language, same thing: abiding in him, and living forever. Here is the negative of that photograph. So they ask the question the whole gospel is built on (John 8:25): who are you? Matt kept noting how often his opponents ask genuinely excellent questions without meaning to.

▶ 1:22:28

> "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."
>
> JOHN 8:28–29 ↗

▶ 1:23:06

Lifted up carries both meanings at once: hoisted on a cross and tortured to death, and lifted into glory in the same act. Matt pushed back here on the common idea that Jesus suffered a relational severance from his Father, because it does not fit his own words — *he has not left me alone.* He suffered death, not abandonment, and for the joy set before him he went. "It's God's joy to pursue you."

4. Children of Abraham

▶ 1:24:42

To those now believing, he says abide in my word and the truth will set you free — and is told they are Abraham's children and have never been slaves to anyone. They are slaves to sin, he answers, and if the Son sets you free you are free indeed. Then John 8:39–40: if you were Abraham's children you would do what Abraham did. And what Abraham did, in Matt's reading, was believe God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Their reply — "we were not born of sexual immorality; we have one Father, even God" — only makes their position worse. If their conduct will not rise to Abraham's, appealing over his head to God is not an improvement.

▶ 1:26:27

When he says whoever keeps his word will never see death, the verdict comes back: now we know you have a demon. “These guys are standing before God himself in the flesh and think he’s demonized,” Matt said — and they were the respected ones, the ones who loved God and saw themselves as the good guys. He answers that if he denied knowing the Father he would be “a liar like you.”

▶ 1:28:58

Then Matt went back through the chapter to show what had been building. Verse 24: unless you believe that *I am*. Verse 28: then you will know that *I am*. In the Greek there is no “he” in either. And finally:

> “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”
>
> JOHN 8:58 ↗

At which point Israel’s teachers pick up stones to kill a rabbi who has healed people in front of them.

5. The night he was betrayed

▶ 1:30:37

In John 13:16–20 a servant is not greater than his master; the betrayal is named in advance out of Psalm 41:9; and the reason given for telling them early is “that you may believe that I am” — the same two words again. Matt drew the practical edge: when we receive a brother or sister Jesus sends, we are receiving Jesus himself, and since we are not greater than he is, his self-lowering ought to make us eager to do the same.

▶ 1:31:47

His last instance was the garden — John 18:1–4, Judas arriving with a band of soldiers and torches, Jesus knowing everything that would happen to him and going out to meet it. The recording is rough through this stretch, and the reading gives way to Hebrews 1:7–8, where angels are winds and flames of fire, but of the Son it is said: your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

Would you have done better?

▶ 1:33:07

Here the message turned on the room. We assume that if God showed up in front of us we would obey immediately. But that is exactly the position Jesus’ audience was in. And if the objection is that they needed more — fireworks, thunder — then consider Sinai, with the fire and the smoke and the trumpet,

and what Israel did next. The Great I AM in the flesh was teaching, raising the dead, casting out devils with a word, healing — "and some loved him and some picked up stones to kill him."

Now, not later

▶ 1:34:23

"It's really dangerous for my default setting to be: I'm the good guy, I'm correct, and for sure if God appeared to me and told me himself, I'd believe it," Matt said. He would rather not bank on a Hail Mary pass. "Now is the time for me to repent. Now is the time to pay attention to the soil of my heart. Right now I can obey him. Right now I can follow him."

Not good cop, bad cop

▶ 1:35:06

The close was the point of the whole hour. Jesus showing himself a good shepherd, a seeker and savior of the lost, a friend of sinners and a healer of the brokenhearted, is not the soft half of a divided God. It is the Father, exactly, because he is the Great I AM in the flesh. The tenderness toward the meek and the poor and the leper — that is the Father's heart, and he went to the cross for the joy set before him.

▶ 1:35:49

"If you believe things about the Father that aren't true of the Son, they're just not true at all."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Psalm 80:8–17
- John 4:16–26
- John 6:16–20
- Job 9:8
- Exodus 3:13–14
- Mark 6:48
- 1 Kings 19:11
- Exodus 33:19
- John 8:12–19
- John 8:23–24
- John 6:51
- John 8:25
- John 8:28–29
- Hebrews 12:2
- John 8:31–32
- John 8:36
- John 8:39–40
- Genesis 15:6
- John 8:41–44
- John 8:51–53
- John 8:54–55
- John 8:58
- John 13:16–20
- Psalm 41:9
- John 18:1–4
- Hebrews 1:7–8
- Exodus 19:16–18

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. The woman at the well called Jesus a prophet — true, and not enough. What is your own not-quite-enough answer to “who are you?”
2. Matt said believing in Jesus and eating the bread of heaven are the same thing said two ways. What does abiding in him look like on an ordinary Tuesday for you?
3. If Jesus was never abandoned by his Father at the cross, and went to it for joy, how does that change what you think God feels toward you when you come to him?
4. The men holding the stones were the devout ones who assumed they were the good guys. Where is that assumption most at work in you?
5. Matt refused to wait for a sign before obeying: “right now I can follow him.” What is the one thing you already know to obey 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=dFuivXJJDUk&t=4245s

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.