

Glory Revealed

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[0 : 00] There are many near-death experiences where people claim to have gone into heaven. You know, it's that feeling of peace. It's the white light at the end of the tunnel.

And a UK doctor named Gary Wood, he was some such person. He was in such a serious car accident that the paramedics pronounced him dead at the scene.

And he claimed to have gone into heaven. And he said this. He said, then this cloud opened up and I saw this giant golden satellite. Suspended in a space that the Bible calls heaven.

And a 70-foot angel spoke to me. Wow. Kerry Packer, the late media tycoon of Australia, he begs to differ. He was also pronounced dead after his 1990 heart attack.

But later on he said, I've been to the other side. And let me tell you, there's nothing there. There's no one waiting for you there. There's no one to judge you. So do what you like. Thanks, Kerry.

[0 : 57] And there were literally hundreds of these near-death experiences where people claimed to have gone into heaven. But in our passage today, this really famous story, what we see is heaven come down here on earth.

And you can see that just before our passage, before chapter 2, the very end of chapter 1. So John chapter 1 verse 50. Yes, back over the page.

Chapter 1 verse 50. See, this was an Old Testament picture of a ladder or a gateway between heaven and earth.

Jesus tells his disciples that as they follow him around, they will see a glimpse of heaven open on earth. And the very next thing John presents is this famous, famous story of the water to wine at the wedding in Cana.

And so let me ask you, what is the strangest thing you've ever seen at a wedding? Perhaps we all probably think about a drunken relative who made a fool of themselves. Maybe a speech that was really terrific.

[2 : 18] At my brother-in-law's wedding, when the minister asked for the rings, they had a remote-control helicopter fly in up the church. And it dropped the rings off to the best man.

That was pretty terrific. Well, one day at a wedding in Cana, heaven broke in because Jesus was there. Have a look at chapter 2 verse 1.

On the third day, a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. And Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. And John doesn't tell us this story so we can make our own conclusions like Kerry Packer and Dr. Wood.

He tells us what we're to make of this in our key verse, verse 11. What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory.

And his disciples believed in him. Here, John is giving us his narrator's comments. He's telling us what we're to make of the event.

[3 : 24] So we're not free to install our own interpretation or our own application. You can do that if you want to miss John's purpose.

John documents these real events to, he says, reveal Jesus' glory so that we would believe in him, just like the first disciples.

The word glory in the Bible, that means the majestic character of God. It is the full weightiness of God. It is the Godness of God, if you like.

The word believe in the Bible is the same word to trust. See, John wants us to trust our whole lives to Jesus. That is, to put him in the driver's seat over every aspect.

Here is a sign that showed the first disciples Jesus' glory, so they trusted in him. John gives us that same opportunity this morning.

[4 : 30] And so my aim is that we would see Jesus is altogether worthy of our trust because he's altogether glorious. I'll say that again. My aim is that we would see Jesus is altogether worthy of our trust because he's altogether glorious.

And there is a handout there. And I want us to see that Jesus reveals his glory as the creator, as the Messiah, and as the bridegroom.

They're the three points on your handout. And to help us see Jesus' full glory like this, we're going to have to dip quite a bit into the Old Testament. But to help us, I've got some slides on the screen. So you only need to keep your Bibles open at John, and the Old Testament stuff will appear on the screen just to make things smoother. We're at point one. And one of the things that makes preaching this passage quite difficult, as Masali rightly pointed out, was how overly familiar we are with Jesus' miracles.

I mean, after all, this is the Bible. This is Jesus. He's always doing miracles. That's just standard stuff for Christianity. But I think the problem is it makes us gloss over amazing things such as water to wine.

[5 : 46] For a brief stint before I was an accountant, I was a biochemist, just at university anyway. And I put the chemical equation for what John claims on your handout.

So John claims that water, H₂O, was transformed into wine, which is ethanol, alcohol, C₂H₅OH. You see, John claims that Jesus has done something ordinarily not possible.

Ordinarily, chemistry shows us that water won't transform into wine. So my glass of water here will not be a Merlot by the end of this talk, which is sad for me.

But it's also quite good because it's 9.30 in the morning, which would be pretty worrying. Science records things ordinarily done. So science tells us that even back then, those people knew enough to know that you cannot make wine this way.

Even they know you need grapes and you need yeast, you need a big barrel and lots of time. You see, if you're going to create a religion, you would not base the first sign on something ordinarily impossible.

[7 : 06] But John says in chapter 1 that through Jesus all things were made. That he made all things. Jesus is the maker, says John. And so if that is true, if he is the maker, the creator, who created the ordinary laws of chemistry, what better way to get our attention than by bending those ordinarily accepted laws to do the extraordinary?

To discount the evidence because it doesn't fit with our preconceived ideas of how water and wine work is just bad science. Here is eyewitness testimony.

We said that in John. Here is good evidence. Jesus changed water into wine. And therefore, as God the creator, that means we can trust Jesus with our whole world, given he made it.

It means we can trust Jesus with every aspect of our lives, given he made us too. Jesus made water from water into wine.

And he thus revealed his glory. Well, let's keep moving. Let's see more of his glory in point two. And let's pick up the story in verse three. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine.

[8 : 33] Woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied, my hour has not yet come. And that is a curious phrase about Jesus' hour.

And it's repeated more and more through John's gospel. And the hour refers to the time of Jesus' death. Chapter 12, verse 27, 13, verse 1, 17, verse 1.

But the hour also refers to the consequences of his death. The resurrection life. You can see that in chapter 5, verse 28. Jesus says, you cannot have the hour of resurrection life until I've had my hour of death.

Jesus dies for sins, thus opening the resurrection life or heaven for his believers. And so in verse 3, Jesus' mother said, they have no more wine.

And I think what she's saying is this. Can you make it so that this wedding will not end in embarrassment? Woman, Jesus says, which it's not as harsh as it sounds to our ears, actually.

[9 : 40] Still a little bit firm, but not so harsh as we might think it is. He says, woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied, my hour has not yet come. And I think what Jesus is saying is this.

This is not the time of resurrection life. When everything will be made right. That comes after my death. After I deal with sin.

But in the meantime, I will give you a glimpse of that heaven, that resurrection life. So let's look at verse 5, what he did.

His mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you. Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding 20 to 30 gallons. Jesus said to the servants, fill the jars with water.

So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. They did so. And the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine.

[10:41] And to help us fully understand this sign, we need to go to the Old Testament, as we said. So this is from Amos. This was our first reading. Can you please have it on the screen?

Amos chapter 9. Great. Amos 9, it speaks of a new age when God would gather and restore his people. When he would dwell amongst them in a land of peace and plenty.

That day, as the prophets called it, was the messianic age. The messianic age, when God's Messiah, that is his ruler, would come, would open heaven.

And one of the marks of the Messiah's arrival, as Amos says, is a very large quantity of wine. So he says in verse 13, You see, Amos' vision says that the days are coming when the harvest will be so plentiful, so abundant, that the gathering of one crop won't be finished before time to sow the next. And you can see that when he says the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman. Thanks, Barry.

This is picture language. Picture language to describe the abundance of the messianic age.

[12:14] When God's ruler, God's king, would come. When the harvest of grapes is so plentiful that the wine would just flow and cover the mountains and drip from the hills.

And this is not condoning alcoholism. Wine here is a picture of celebration and joy. Amos provides a vision of cosmic celebration represented by an abundance of grapes.

And so if you hold all that in your mind and come back to John, to our wedding in Cana, Jesus creates enough wine to fill what John says is six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing.

He says that each jar holds 20 to 30 gallons filled to the brim. Now, I grew up in a time sort of metric, not empirical. So gallons for me is sort of funny speak.

But I've done it. Even the Bible does a bit of calculation. We're told each jar 75 to 115 liters. And I put an equation. So the accountant in me came out. I put an equation there.

[13:23] 75 to 115 liters, six jars. It's around about 570 liters or 800 bottles of wine. That is pretty serious stuff.

But when you have that amount of wine and the picture of Amos in your mind, the point is this. The messianic age is open.

Jesus is able to open heaven because he is the Messiah. Thus, he revealed his glory. And it's not just the, so that's quantity of wine from Amos, but it's also the quality of wine.

So go back into John, verse 9. And the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink. But you have saved the best till now.

[14:28] You see, their custom was to serve the best wine first, cheap stuff at the end. That makes sense, too, doesn't it? You don't want to waste the Grange when people are too drunk to appreciate it.

Serve the good stuff first. And spare a thought for our poor old groom. You see, he served what he thinks is his best wine, as was their custom. He's trying to impress the guests, impress his new in-laws, which is a tough ask.

But when the master of the banquet tastes Jesus' wine, he says, oh, that first wine was like \$5 plonk. And fine wine is significant in the Old Testament.

So Isaiah 25, please, thank you, Barry. Here is a snapshot of heaven or the new creation, we sometimes call it.

So Isaiah says, verse 6, On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, the finest of wines.

[15:29] It is a sensory overload. Isaiah says that heaven will be like God throwing a feast. He says, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, the finest of wines.

Fantastic. And now in John, here is Jesus making the best of wines. And I think that's quite interesting, isn't it? Because most people would think that if Jesus turned up to a party, he'd turn the wine into water.

Like some sort of, you know, divine wet blanket or party poop. But Jesus loves a party. He brings the best stuff to dinner. His wine is the Grange Hermitage.

It's the Hill of Grace. It's the Chateau Neuf de Pap. It's the 52 Margot and all those sort of famous brands. See, that's what happens when Jesus turns his hands to grapes.

He is God's Messiah. And he is giving everyone a glimpse of heaven. Thus he revealed his glory. And here's the thing.

[16:38] The heavenly banquet is not just about the quantity of wine from Amos, nor the quality of wine from Isaiah. Have a look at the end of, I've indented it separately, verse 7.

On this mountain, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.

He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. You see, just as good as an endless heavenly party is death being swallowed up.

Is all tears being wiped away forever. Isaiah calls death a shroud that enfolds all people. We know that is true.

Some of us are quite close to death in our families. It's quite close to us at this time. And if it's not, it will be. Because Isaiah says that it covers all the nations.

[17:46] He says that death is always characterized by tears. And I think Isaiah is saying that heaven will be like an endless wedding party and not a teary funeral.

Because God will deal with death once and for all. And this is so interesting because Isaiah's picture here of heaven.

So a wedding banquet and no more death. That is exactly the same as John's presentation. So John's first two signs are a wedding banquet in Cana.

And in chapter 4, a boy healed from death. And if you can turn in your John's Gospel to just over the page 1. So 4 verse 46.

Over the page. John is deliberately forcing us to put the first and second signs together. So 4 verse 46. Once more, he, Jesus, visited Cana in Galilee where he turned the water into wine.

[18:54] So he wants us to keep that first sign in our heads. And down at the bottom, at the end of verse 53. End of 53. Your son will live.

That is no more death. So he and his whole household believed. Same reaction as the first sign. And then verse 54. This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee. John is forcing us to hold the first and second signs together. Both people believe. Both in Cana, both in Galilee. Because John is saying that the Isaiah picture of heaven.

Wedding banquet. No more death. Is exactly what happens when Jesus shows up. First sign, a wedding banquet. Second sign, no more death. Isaiah's point is that heaven is now a reality.

Because the Messiah is here. Heaven is a reality. Because the Messiah is now here. And although not fully realized.

[20:02] Remember, Jesus' hour, not fully here yet. We're still waiting for the full resurrection life. The full consummation of his hour.

But in the meantime, he provides us with just a glimpse. Just a glimpse at a wedding party. So we will see him as the Messiah.

That we will trust in him with our whole lives. Thus he revealed his glory. And as amazing as water to wine is, this is not a sign about heaven.

Remember, a key verse. This reveals the glory of Jesus. Not the glory of heaven. So Jesus is the source of satisfaction and pleasure.

He is the source of resurrection life. He is the one who will swallow up death. He will wipe away every tear. He will host the banquet in heaven. He is the center of everything.

[21:00] This heavenly banquet will only be incredible. Will only be a success. Because Jesus will be there. Just like this at the wedding in Cana. It was only a success when Jesus showed up.

All these good things flow out of Jesus. The best thing about heaven is that Jesus will be there. Jesus' first disciples, they rightly guessed that he was the Messiah.

As this sign shows the rest of us here today. But water to wine, it also reveals his glory as the bridegroom. And this is our last point.

Jesus is the bridegroom. And running out of wine at a wedding back then was the same as running out of wine at a wedding today. It's a disaster.

And I don't think anyone in history has ever said, Wow, this party is a real downer. I know what we should do. Let's invite a bunch of Christians. That'll really help. I don't think anyone has ever said that.

[22 : 03] And as far as weddings go, in our culture, it's the bride's parents. Isn't that what we say? The bride's parents, they take out the second mortgage and pay for the wedding. I was too scared to find out what the average cost of a wedding is.

But it's north of \$50,000 these days. So there you go. If you've got some daughters, look out. But historians tell us that back in those days, it was the groom's responsibility.

He was to secure the success of the wedding. He was to secure the food and the drink. Historians tell us that if the wedding reception was a disaster, that the groom could be sued.

Ooh, that's really bad. But even worse than that, imagine in their honor and shame culture, imagine a culture like that. If you couldn't even supply the wine on your first day of marriage, you're showing everyone what sort of provider you're likely to be.

And so Jesus is really kind, he's really gracious to help this groom out, to sort out their drinks problem. The groom was in a terrible situation.

[23 : 09] And notice at the very end of verse 10, notice that Jesus lets the groom take the credit for what we all know he did privately.

So the master, end of verse 10, the master of the banquet says, but you, that is you, the groom, you have saved the best till now. He didn't do anything. All he did was poorly plan a wedding.

Jesus was the one who did everything. Jesus steps up. He secures the success of the wedding as a good bridegroom should.

And just as we did for wine, we also need to do for bridegroom. We have to ground ourselves in the Old Testament. You see, often God would describe himself as a bridegroom or a husband.

In Isaiah, and I've printed this one on your handouts. So there's just a small excerpt from Isaiah in point three. In the midst of promises about heaven, God describes himself as a husband.

[24 : 11] So he says, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

You can see the parallelism there. And as we go through John's gospel more and more, especially these opening chapters, we're going to see imagery of Old Testament weddings as we go through to chapter four.

And John's point is that the bridegroom has come. Jesus is here. Actually, by the time we get to chapter four, it is shocking who Jesus chooses to be his bride.

Do make sure you come back for that. But this is so important because of this. You see, a Jesus who is our bridegroom means he doesn't just want our worship.

He wants a relationship. The point is that Jesus wants to be as close to his people as a husband is to his bride.

When speaking about God, Christians, we rightly use words such as worship and obey and reverence. But because Jesus is the bridegroom, this means we can now use words such as love and relationship and intimacy and tender care and family and trust.

[25 : 32] Other religious people worship and revere their God. But we Christians are in a relationship with ours. It's unique.

And of course, by the end of John. Jesus will die for his bride. As a good bridegroom should. He is altogether worthy of our trust because he's altogether glorious.

And water to wine, ladies and gentlemen, that is just the first sign. John's gospel is punctuated with more and more of these signs.

At the end of the book, he tells us why. This is a slide on the screen. He says, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these signs are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[26 : 36] John has carefully assembled these signs. It's utterly sophisticated. Not because they're nifty tricks to impress the masses, but because these signs show us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

They're designed to convince us that he is altogether worthy of our trust. And that by trusting him with our whole lives, he will give us eternal life or a seat at that wedding banquet, if you like.

And for those of you here or people you know who aren't Christians, people who aren't Christians who want to run their own lives, they cannot bear the weight of that trust.

They are simply not that glorious. None of us are. This is true for those of us who are Christians here as well. Yes, Christians, we trust our lives to Jesus, but we're always trying to wrestle aspects back from his authority.

We're always relying on ourselves better than handing over our lives to him. We think we can run aspects better than he can. We can't bear the weight of that trust, even from ourselves.

[27 : 57] We're simply not that glorious. You see, only Jesus, only Jesus carries the full majestic nature of God, the full character, the glory of God.

Only he can be trusted with our whole lives, with our eternal life. And so for the non-believers, for the believers, for the excited believers, for the worn out believers, take a good look at the real Jesus from history.

And let me ask you, is there anything about him that is less than glorious? Just today, Jesus the creator, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the bridegroom, is there anything about him that means we can't trust our whole life to?

Let's pray.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we declare as one people that you are altogether glorious. We thank you that you show us who you really are in your word.

[29 : 21] Would we trust in you? Would we entrust our whole lives, every aspect of our lives to you and your care? Please give us a bigger picture of you as we go through John, as we go into a new week.

We ask it in your namesake. Amen.