

Glory Revealed

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[0 : 00] There are many people who claim to have had a near-death experience, and they claim to have gone up into heaven. And it's the same old story. It's that feeling of peace and calm. It's that white light at the end of the tunnel.

And there was a doctor in the UK named Gary Wood, and Dr. Wood was in such a serious car accident that the paramedics pronounced him dead at the scene. And he claimed to have ascended 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, that's pretty good. Kerry Packer, the late media tycoon, he begs to differ. He was also pronounced dead after his 1990 heart attack.

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

And there are literally hundreds of people who claim to have gone up into heaven at a near-death experience. But in our passage, we have a glimpse of heaven down here on earth.

[1 : 14] You can see that in the verses just before our passage today. So in your Bibles, turn to John 1, verse 50. 1, verse 50.

Jesus said, You believe, to Nathan, You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that. He then added, Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

You see, this was an Old Testament picture of a ladder or a gateway between heaven and earth. Jesus tells his disciples, You will see heaven open wherever I travel.

And the very next thing John presents for us is this wedding in Cana. And so let me ask you, what is the strangest thing you've ever seen at a wedding? Have you ever been to a wedding where someone stood someone else up at the altar?

I haven't. Have you ever been to a wedding where perhaps an uncle got a bit too intoxicated and made a fool of themselves? I have. I'm not the uncle.

[2 : 22] I have been to a wedding like that. What about an amazing speech? There's Booth and Alice. At their wedding, right when the minister asked for the rings, they had a helicopter, a toy helicopter, fly in through the length of the church and drop off the rings to the best man.

It was amazing. Well, one day at a wedding in Cana, heaven showed up or heaven broke in. Because Jesus was there.

And let's pick up our action in 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 famous story so we can make up our own conclusion about the events, like Kerry Packer or Dr. Wood. John tells us what we're to make of it in our key verse, which is verse 11.

Our key verse, 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.

[3 : 36] Here, John gives his narrator's comments. He's telling us how to interpret the narrative. So we're not free to install our own meaning or our own application.

I guess we can do that if you want to miss the narrative. Hello. He's going to help me, I think. It's all right. What John does is John documents real events for us to reveal Jesus' glory.

That's what he tells us in verse 11. So that we would believe in him 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, that means to trust. John wants us to trust our whole lives to Jesus.

That is, to put him in the driver's seat. Here is a sign which showed the first disciples Jesus' glory. And so they entrusted their lives to him.

[4 : 53] Well, John gives us the same opportunity here this morning. And so my aim is the same of John's. That we would see Jesus is altogether worthy of our trust because he's altogether glorious.

Say that again. My aim is that we would see Jesus is altogether worthy of our trust because he's altogether glorious. And I've got a handout there. And the points on the handout will help you. And we're going to be ducking into the Old Testament quite a bit. But we'll have that printout on the screen. So you can just stay with your Bibles in John's Gospel. And I want us to see that Jesus reveals his glory as the creator, as the Messiah, and as the bridegroom.

And so let's go to point one. One of the things that makes preaching this passage quite difficult is how overly familiar we are with miracles. After all, this is the Bible.

This is Jesus. Of course, he performs miracles. That's just standard stuff for Christianity. But I think that means we often can miss how incredible it is that water being turned into wine.

[6 : 04] For a brief stint, I used to be a biochemist, at least at university. And what I did was I put the chemical equation of what John claims on your handout.

John Quinn, he's an actual chemist. I am not. So he can confirm whether what I'm saying is correct. But what the claim is, is H₂O water was turned into C₂H₅OH or alcohol, ethanol.

That's water to wine. Jesus does something ordinarily unlikely. See, ordinarily, chemistry shows that H₂O does not become alcohol.

So my glass of water down there, it will not become a Merlot by the end of this sermon, which is bad for me, but also good for you because it's a quarter past 11 and you don't want your pastors drinking this early.

Science records things. Science records things for us that is ordinarily possible. Even the people back then, they knew that ordinarily water doesn't become wine.

[7 : 13] Even those people knew to make wine, you need grapes, you need yeast, you need a barrel, and you need lots of time. And this is really important because if you're going to create a religion, you would not choose one where the first sign is something ordinarily impossible.

But John says in chapter 1 that through Jesus all things were made, that he made all things. John's claim is that Jesus is the maker, the creator, who created the laws of chemistry.

And so what better way to get our attention than by bending these ordinarily accepted laws to something extraordinary?

What better way to get our attention? See, to discount the evidence, because it doesn't fit with our preconceived ideas of how water and wine work, that's just bad science.

Here is eyewitness testimony. Here is good evidence of water to wine. And as God the creator, that means we can trust Jesus with our whole world, given he made it.

[8 : 24] It means we can trust Jesus with every aspect of our lives, given he made us to. He changed water to wine. Thus he revealed his glory.

And let's see more of Jesus' glory. Let's keep going. This is point number two, and we'll pick up the story in verse three. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine. Woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied, my hour has not yet come. This curious phrase about Jesus' hour, it keeps coming up more and more through John's gospel.

And the hour refers to the time of his death. Chapter 12, verse 1. Chapter 13, verse 1. 17, verse 1. But the hour is also the consequences of his death.

Chapter 5, verse 28. Jesus says, you cannot have the hour of resurrection life, that is a consequence of his death, resurrection life, until I've had my hour of death.

[9 : 31] Jesus dies for our sins, thus opening resurrection life and heaven for all of us. And so in verse 3, his mother says, they have no more wine.

And I think what he's saying is this. Can you make it, Jesus? Can you make it so that this wedding will not end in embarrassment? And he says, woman, which actually, it sounds quite harsh to our ears today, but it's not actually as harsh back then.

A little bit firm, but not as harsh as it sounds to our ears. He says, woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come. I think he's saying this.

This is not the time of resurrection life, when all things will be made right. That comes after the hour of my death, after I deal with sin.

But in the meantime, he gives them a glimpse of heaven. So let's see verse 5. 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 from 20 to 30 gallons.

[10:37] 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.

To help us fully understand what is going on here, we need to go to the Old Testament. And this is our first reading from Amos. Amos 9. Can I have it on the screen, please?

Amos 9. Thank you. Amos 9 speaks of the days when God will gather and restore his people, when he would dwell among them again in a land of peace and plenty.

That day, as the prophets call it, was the messianic age when God's Messiah, his ruler, would arrive, when he would open the way of heaven for his believers.

And one of the marks of the Messiah in Amos is a very large quantity of wine. So he says, The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes.

[11:47] New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills, and I will bring my people back from exile. Amos' vision says, The days are coming when the harvest will be so plentiful that the harvesting of one crop won't be finished before the sowing of the next.

You can see that there in the verse, the reaper overtaken by the ploughman. And this is picture language. It is picture language to describe the abundance of the messianic age, the abundance of heaven.

When the harvest of the grapes is so plentiful that wine will just drip from the hills and flow from the mountains. This is not condoning alcoholism.

Wine is a picture of celebration and joy. Amos provides a picture of cosmic celebration, a glimpse of heaven here represented by an extraordinary quantity of wine.

And fast forward that to our wedding in Cana, and here is Jesus creating enough wine to fill, what John says, is six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding 20 to 30 gallons, a fill to the brim.

[13:03] Now, I grew up after the empirical system. To me, that's sort of funny speak. So, in metric terms, 20 to 30 gallons, I've put this on your handout, 20 to 30 gallons is 75 to 115 litres.

Six jars, that's 570 litres. Jesus made 800 bottles of wine, which is not bad. And to help us get a perspective on how much that is, I brought a prop.

I haven't brought 800 bottles of wine, but I brought a few. So, Sue and Katie, can you help me with this? So, here is a bottle, here is a bottle, here is a bottle, here is a bottle, here is a bottle, here is a bottle, here is a bottle, come on, here is a bottle, here is a bottle, here is a bottle, here is another bottle, here is a bottle, and Vera, you better hold these last two.

You can put them in the box. It's a very good question. I crowdsourced them. Tom Kimber, Tom, Tom Kimber was diving in bins this week to get them, so, cheers Tom.

Thank you, sorry, it's a bit too much distraction, isn't it? Chinking. All I did then, was show you 11, 11 bottles of wine, and that got a bit tedious after a while. Jesus produced 800.

[14:30] So, not something that was accidentally left in the storeroom, or easily forgotten, by the master of the banquet. Jesus creates an abundant quantity of wine, wine, and when you hold in mind that picture of Amos that was on the screen before, the point is this, the messianic age has begun.

Jesus is able to open the way to heaven, because he's the Messiah, and thus he revealed his glory. And it's not just the quantity of wine, that's amazing, it's the quality of wine too.

So, back in John chapter 2, verse 9, 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.

They 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.

You see, their custom at a wedding was to serve the good stuff first, cheap stuff at the end. That makes sense too, doesn't it? You don't want to serve the grange when your guests are too drunk to appreciate it.

[15 : 43] And spare a thought for our poor old groom, because he has served his best wine first, as was their custom, you know, to impress the guests, and certainly to impress the in-laws.

But when the master of the banquet tastes Jesus' wine, he says, oh, yours is like \$5 plonk. Only good for a bolognese. And here, fine wine, that's important in the Bible.

In the Old Testament, in Isaiah. Can I have the printer on the screen, please? So this is Isaiah's picture of heaven. Just have a look at the first half, 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, and the finest of wines.

Isaiah says that heaven will be like God throwing a feast. He calls it a banquet of aged wine. The best of meats, the finest of wines. It's a sensory overload, if you like.

[16 : 48] And here is Jesus, making the best of wine. And I think that's really interesting, actually, because most people would think if Jesus turned up to a party, he'd turn the wine to water, like some sort of divine wet blanket.

Jesus loves a party. He's the guest who brings the very best wine, not the cheap stuff. His is the Grange Hermitage. It's the Hill of Grace. It's the 52 Margot.

It's the Chateau Neuf-de-Pape, and all those other fancy labels. That's what happens when Jesus turns his hands to grapes. Jesus is God's Messiah.

He's showing everyone a glimpse of that heaven. Thus he revealed his glory. And this is really interesting, because the thing about heaven is not just the quantity of wine from Amos.

It's not just the quality of wine from Isaiah. But have a look at the bottom half of Isaiah. I've deliberately separated them out into two. On this mountain, that is where heaven is, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.

[18 : 01] 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 a heavenly party is, is a place where there's no more death, where all the tears have been wiped away.

Isaiah calls death a shroud that covers all people. And we know that's true. For some of us, death is close to our families. If it's not right now, it will be.

Isaiah says that it covers all nations. He shows us that death is always characterized by tears. And I think what Isaiah is showing us here is that heaven is an endless wedding party and not a teary funeral.

It's a wedding, not a funeral. That is heaven. And this is really interesting. Isaiah's picture of heaven here, which is a wedding and no more death, that is exactly the picture John presents for us in his gospel with the first two signs.

So today we're doing sign number one. In a few weeks, we'll get to sign number two. And Jesus' first sign is a wedding. His second sign is a boy being healed from death.

[19 : 26] So you can see that. Have a look over the page, chapter 4, verse 43. Sorry, 4, verse 46. Once more, he, Jesus, visited Cana in Galilee where he had turned water into wine.

John is asking us to pair these two signs together. Further down at the end of verse 53, your son will live. That is, there's no more death. So he and his whole household believed.

There's that same reaction of belief. This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea in Galilee. And John's point is this, that the Isaiah picture of heaven, wedding banquet, no more death, is now a reality because Jesus is here.

The first two signs of Jesus, a wedding banquet and no more death. The Isaiah heaven is a reality because the Messiah is here.

Yes, it's not fully his hour. It's not the hour of resurrection life. Jesus' future coming will bring all this hour into, I guess, proper consummation.

[20 : 42] But in the meantime, he provides just a glimpse at a wedding so we will see him as the Messiah. So we will trust in him.

And as amazing as water to wine is, it is only, this is not a sign about heaven. This is a sign that reveals Jesus' glory.

Remember our key verse, this reveals the glory of Jesus. So he is the source of satisfaction and pleasure. He is the source of resurrection life. He is the one who will swallow up death.

He is the one who will wipe away every tear. He is the one hosting the banquet. He is the center of everything. The heavenly banquet will only be incredible because Jesus will be there.

Just as that smaller wedding banquet was only a success when Jesus decided to turn up. And his disciples, they rightly guess that he is the Messiah as this miracle shows us here today.

[21 : 49] But it also reveals that he is the bridegroom. And this is our last point. Jesus is the bridegroom. Running out of wine at a wedding back then was the same as running out of wine at a wedding today.

It was a disaster. And I don't think anyone in history has ever said, wow, you know, this party is really bad. You know what can make it work? I know. Let's invite a bunch of Christians. No one has ever said that.

And as far as weddings go, in today's day and age, we always say it's the bride's parents who take out the second mortgage. Spare a thought for Doug and Carol. A couple of weeks ago, their daughter was married.

Don't ask Doug for any money. He's got none left. He's actually got two more daughters. So there you go. But back then, back then historians tell us that it was the groom's responsibility for the wedding.

He was supposed to secure the food and the wine. We're told that if anything went wrong with the weddings back then, that the groom could actually be sued, which is pretty scary.

[22 : 52] But even worse than that, in their honour and shame culture, imagine if you can't even supply the wine on your first day of marriage, you're showing everyone what sort of provider you're going to be.

And so it's really kind of Jesus to step in to help this poor old groom out of a terrible social situation. At the end of verse 10, notice that Jesus lets the groom take the credit for something that we all know he didn't do.

So the master of the banquet says to the groom, you have saved the best till now. He didn't do anything. All he did was poorly plan his wedding. Jesus steps up.

He secures the success of this wedding party as a good bridegroom should. And just as we did for the wine, we're going to quickly duck into the Old Testament to think about the bridegroom.

You see, often God would describe himself as a husband or a bridegroom in the Old Testament.

And I printed a passage there on your handout, just a little excerpt from Isaiah.

[24 : 00] It says, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. And as we go through John's gospel, we'll see more and more and more that the bridegroom has arrived.

We're going to see more and more of these Old Testament images of weddings. By the time we get to chapter four, it'll be shocking to see who Jesus chooses as his bride.

We're going to be doing a guest event for that when we get to John 4, so do make sure you're here for that. But here's the point. This is so important because a Jesus who is a bridegroom doesn't just want worship but wants a relationship.

See, the point is that Jesus wants to be as close to his people as husband is to his bride. When speaking about God, we Christians, we rightly use words of obedience and worship and reverence. But because Jesus is the bridegroom, that means we also get to use words such as love, relationship, family, intimacy, tender care, trust.

[25 : 19] Other religious people may worship and obey their God. But we Christians are in a relationship with ours. It is unique. And of course, by the end of John, Jesus will die for his bride as a good groom should.

He is altogether worthy of our trust because he's altogether glorious. And that is just the first sign, water to wine. The rest of John's gospel is punctuated by more of these signs.

At the end of the book, he tells us why he's doing that. Can I have the slide, please? Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written that you may believe, you may trust that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. You see, John has carefully assembled certain signs, not because they're nifty tricks to impress the masses, but because these signs that he has selected are enough to convince us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

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

[26 : 51] And for those of you here who aren't Christians, who want to run your own lives, your own way, you cannot bear the weight of that trust.

You're simply not that glorious. None of us are. The same lesson is true for those of us who are Christians. So even as Christians, we're always trying to wrestle aspects of our lives back from Jesus' authority.

We're always relying on ourselves to do stuff better than Jesus can. We cannot bear the weight of that trust either. We're not that glorious as well.

See, only a Jesus who carries the full majestic character, the full glory of God can be trusted with our lives, 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 Jesus of history as presented in this one sign.

[27 : 59] Is there anything about him that is less than glorious? Just today, Jesus is creator, he's Messiah, he's the bridegroom. Is there anything about him that you can't trust with your whole life?

And our key verse, what Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed or trusted in him.

So let's pray. Our Lord Jesus, we declare as one people that you are altogether glorious and therefore altogether worthy of our trust.

Would you enlarge our view of you? Show us who you really are? Take away our tired, worn-out views of you? Help us see that you are the Messiah, the creator and the bridegroom.

And would we hand over our whole lives to you that we would get eternal life. In your name. Amen.