

# Glory Revealed!

Amos 9:11-15, John 2:1-12 (ESV)

December 10, 2006

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when...the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel” (Amos 9:13-14 (ESV)). “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” Jesus Christ made the wine flow. Jesus Christ restored the fortune of the people of God. Jesus Christ fulfilled the ancient prophecy. Jesus Christ inaugurated the age of salvation. Jesus Christ “manifested his glory,” “glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14 (ESV)). “And his disciples believed in him.” “His disciples believed in him.” Have we believed in him? Do we believe in him? Shall we believe in him? Lord, help us!

“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” What is his glory? His glory is that he is the Word of God, present with and among us. His glory is that he is the Son of God, present with and among us. His glory is that he is the very presence of God with us, among us, and for us. Thanks be to God! And he manifested that glory at a wedding feast, turning gallons and gallons and gallons of water into good, sweet wine. How very strange!

His hour had not yet come, though that very observation includes the promise that his hour will come, and in that is our good hope. We might think that he would have had something more important to do than providing refreshments for the wedding guests who had already depleted the initial supply of wine and who were in no condition to appreciate what he had done. And yet, in and through that action, he provided us a sign of who he is and of who we are. Do we perceive the sign as a sign? Can we understand the meaning of the sign? Most importantly, do we dare to believe in the doer of the sign?

The action itself is as understated as possible. “Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.’ So they took it.” That is all. There is no prayer. There is no laying on of hands. There are only simple commands and ready obedience.

The action makes sense only in the context of the opening verses of this gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....All things were made through him, and without him not any thing made

that was made” (John 1:1, 3 (ESV)). Conversely, apart from this context the action would make no sense at all. That is to say, given the understanding that Christ is the creator of the universe and all that is in it, changing a few gallons of water into wine is not an impossibility but simply a sign of who Jesus is. But for those who regard the universe as eternal, for those who reject out of hand any notion of creation, for those who reject any possibility of this action, there is no sign. There is no manifestation of glory. There is no discipleship. There is no believing. We would do well not to go that direction.

Given the changing of water into wine, how is it a sign, and how does Jesus manifest his glory through it? “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when...the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel.” With the action of Christ, the day of salvation has begun. By this sign, the day of salvation has dawned. It is here. The glory of Jesus Christ, “glory as of the only Son from the Father,” is that in and through him God is saving his people.

The six stone water jars that Jesus used were for the Jewish rites of purification. What had been meant to hold wash water now held the first sign of Christ’s glory. What had been used to make oneself right before God now held a wonderful gift from God. So there was a shift here, in the change of water into wine, from one eon to another. Everything changed. All the old rituals were finished and gone. “The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17b (ESV)). Now forgiveness of sin and newness of life are to be had in Jesus Christ alone. Here at the beginning of his ministry, at the wedding at Cana, his gift of abundant wine points ahead to the even more abundant gifts of the forgiveness sin and of eternal life that he came to lavish upon us.

Consider the significance that this first sign was done at a wedding. It may have been the wedding of one of his relatives, since his mother was there and apparently involved in helping with the arrangements. The church has long appreciated that Christ graced this wedding not only with his gift but also with his very presence, and the church has taken very seriously that God in Jesus Christ blesses marriage. In this we rejoice, and for this we give thanks.

In addition to this blessing of marriage, we also have here in Christ’s attendance at the wedding another image of the salvation he brings to us. The basic human problem is estrangement, not only from each other but also and especially from God. It is no accident that the joy of salvation has often been compared to that of a wedding, that the reconciliation between God and humanity has been compared to the love of a husband and wife, and that Christ and his church have been portrayed as a groom and bride. As it is written in the prophecy of Isaiah:

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,  
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,  
and her salvation as a burning torch....  
[F]or the Lord delights in you....  
For as a young man marries a young woman...  
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,  
so shall your God rejoice over you.”  
(Isaiah 62:1, 4, 5 (ESV))

That Christ's first sign occurred at a wedding points us beyond this one family's joy to the great day of salvation when God himself will rejoice in his people as in a bride, and that day has come in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps only a few people perceived this first sign of changing water into wine. It may not have been the guests. It may not have been the servants. But at least his disciples believed in Jesus. In fact, today's reading is the first time they are called "his disciples," and that is done twice, once at the beginning and again at the end. And at the end it says not only that his disciples believed, but that they believed in him. This is more than general religious fervor. This has to do with personal commitment. They believed in him. They trusted him. They followed him. And to believe in Jesus Christ, to trust Jesus Christ, and to commit yourself to Jesus Christ is what we know as saving faith. The changing of the water into wine, this first sign of salvation, this manifestation of the glory of God in Jesus Christ, found its proper goal when the disciples believed in Jesus. Will it find its goal again in us?

In and through this ancient gospel, even we are invited to see the glory of Jesus Christ. John invites us to join him in looking at Jesus and in perceiving that he is, indeed, the Son of God, full of grace and truth, from whom we receive mercy and forgiveness. That is his glory. If you do not need forgiveness, this will not be of any interest to you. But if your heart aches, if your soul trembles, if you weep about the evil you have done and cannot undo, and if you worry about the good you have not done and now cannot do, then the gospel of Jesus Christ is for you, and his grace and mercy are being poured out here for you. This is the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Changing water into wine is not important in and of itself. Jesus is not a magician. He is not interested in amusing an audience, and he is not worried about the thirst of wedding guests. This is the occasion, chosen in the providence of God, for Jesus to set forth evidence, or maybe just a suggestion, a sign, of who he is and what he is about. Do you see his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father?

In and through this ancient gospel, even we are also invited to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is by believing that we see his glory. To believe

in him is to trust in him and to have complete confidence in him. To believe in him is to acknowledge him as divine. The alternative is to trust in ourselves, and we should know ourselves well enough by now to know better than to do that. We should know by now that we are not very trustworthy. When we should be worshipping God, we tend to be promoting self. When we should be following Jesus, we are following some other path. When we should be looking out for each other, we tend to be taking care of self. You know this.

It may make sense in this life, up to a point, to try to be self-reliant and independent, though even in this life we cannot accomplish much alone. But self-reliance will not get you to heaven. It does not work that way. It is humanly impossible. If we were good enough to get ourselves to heaven, we would not need Jesus Christ. But we do need Jesus Christ. Here we are, standing in the need of prayer, standing in the need of forgiveness, standing in the need of love, standing in the need of grace, mercy, and salvation. And that which we need is what God brings to us and gives to us in Jesus Christ. And the only way to receive it is to quit being so confident in ourselves and instead to begin trusting—that is, believing in—Jesus Christ alone.

We are called upon to relinquish faith in ourselves—either positive confidence in our own goodness or negative confidence in our irredeemability—and to place our trust, confidence, and faith in Jesus Christ alone, the only Son of God. We are not lord, even of our own lives. Jesus is Lord, and it is life itself so to realize and to acknowledge. The whole reading leads up to this: “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” That was the point of it all. That was the goal. That was the purpose of the sign. And it still is, for you and me, today. So, we are invited both to see his glory and also to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Finally, in and through this ancient gospel even we are called upon to obey Jesus Christ. That is to say, Jesus Christ is not only our Savior but is also our Lord. It is not only the case that Jesus saves us from sin, death and evil. It is also the case that when he does so, we owe him everything: heart, soul, mind, and strength, our very lives. Having been forgiven, we are called upon to obey. We have a new Lord and master. We are no longer in charge of our own lives. We have been given the active responsibility of obeying, following, and serving Jesus Christ. The Lord of the universe is also the Lord of our lives.

We have good instruction for this in the words of the mother of Jesus. She says to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” That is good, simple advice. But it is more than that. These are words of life. These have become the guide for every generation of Christians since: “Do whatever he tells you.” Thus Christianity is about both faith and life. Without faith, we would have no reason or capability to

obey Christ. But without obedience, or at least the striving to follow and to obey him, we have no true faith in him. Can you see the glory of God revealed here? Do you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? And are you ready to do whatever he tells you?

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*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

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