

2 Corinthians 3:7-4:6
Exodus 34
Psalm 86

“The Gospel of the Glory of Christ”

March 20, 2016

What did Moses do when he saw the glory of the LORD?

He asked the Lord to forgive their sin and take Israel for his inheritance.
Justification and Adoption.

And then God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses for the second time.
Sanctification (holy living).

From that day on, whenever Moses went in before the LORD –
whenever he went into the presence of God,
he would remove the veil.
But when he came out, he would veil his face.

Why does Moses veil his face?

Perhaps more importantly, why does he take the veil off when he goes back *in*?

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul will give us the answer.

It’s because the glory was fading.
The glory of the LORD that was reflected in Moses’ face
kept fading.
Moses needed constant booster shots of glory
in order to keep the glory shining!

It’s sort of like what Hebrews says about the sacrifices in the Old Testament.

One wasn’t enough.
They had to keep offering sacrifices every year – every day! –
which, if you think about it, means that we’re hopelessly stuck.
We need a once-for-all sacrifice.
We need a glory that does not fade – that does not need constant booster shots!

We need Jesus!

Our Psalm of response draws on Exodus 34 to plead with God to do precisely that.

Who is God?
God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”
Please, LORD, do what you have promised and save me!

Sing Psalm 86 (stanzas 1-4, 10-12)

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6

This week the session gave me your surveys to read.

God’s timing is always interesting!

Fourteen years ago I put together a plan for preaching through the whole Bible.
I wanted to make sure that you would get a balanced diet of scripture.
So there was a gospel every four years.
One of the books of Moses every three years.
One epistle each year.
One of the major prophets every four years.
A miniseries on the Psalms in between other series.
And every four years a catechetical series
in order to provide a summary of Christian doctrine and practice.
As I thought about how to preach Paul's epistles,
I decided to put 2 Corinthians toward the end.

Little did I guess that what Paul says about preaching in 2 Corinthians
would be exactly what we need to think about together right now.
But God knew that!

I have not always been clear in helping you understand how to apply the text.
So let me just put the application very clearly right here up front:
Paul's point to you in this text is that you need hear and believe the gospel.
You need to be diligent in the hearing of the word –
because the preaching of Jesus Christ is the way that the Holy Spirit saves us.

You can't save yourself.
I can't save you.

But the Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word,
an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners,
and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.
(shorter catechism 89)

And Paul does this by contrasting the old covenant and the new covenant (chapter 3, verses 7-18),
and then he applies that to the preaching ministry of the church (4, 1-6).

1. The Glory of Moses and the Glory of the Spirit (3:7-18)

Paul starts by contrasting the glory of Moses and the glory of the Holy Spirit (verses 7-18).
Moses' face shone with a reflected glory – the glory that Moses had seen on mountain.
But Moses' glory was a temporary and fading glory –
just as Moses' ministry was a temporary and fading ministry.

Back in the 2nd century, Melito of Sardis understood this.
In his Easter sermon "On Pascha" – on the Passover –
he said that the Mosaic Covenant – the Law –
was like the architect's plans for a house.
When you are building a house, you need a plan.
And when you are building a house, the plan – the blueprint –

is beautiful.

You *love* the plans – you study the plans – you live according to the plans...

But once the house is built, you don't live in the plans – you live in the house!

The *house* is more glorious than the plans.

That's very much what Paul is getting at with his discussion of

“what was being brought to an end”

and “what is permanent”

contrasting the glory of Moses and the glory of the Spirit.

a. The Ministry of Death and the Ministry of Righteousness (3:7-11)

⁷ Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. ¹⁰ Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it.

¹¹ For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

Paul says that the ministry of righteousness – the preaching of the gospel – has more glory than what Israel saw on the face of Moses.

So let's drop back a moment and think about what Israel saw on Moses' face, and what the Corinthians saw in Paul.

Israel saw Moses' face *shine*.

They saw the glory of the LORD appear at Mt Sinai –
and then visibly transfer from Mt Sinai to the tabernacle,
as the glory of the LORD filled the holy place.

Wouldn't you like to see someone's face *literally* shine?!

But Paul says that this was a fading glory – a temporary glory –
a glory that comes to have “no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it.”

What is the glory that surpasses the fading glory of Moses?

The glory that we see in the face of Jesus (4:6).

How did the Corinthians see the glory in the face of Jesus?

By the Spirit of God working in their hearts

through the preaching of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Paul's opponents will say that in person Paul is not very impressive.

“His letters are weighty and strong,

but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.” (10:10)

Many commentators have suggested that Paul is dealing with a sort of “celebrity culture”

in first century Corinth.
The Corinthians were attracted to showy preachers who made a big splash –
and were gifted in rhetoric and style.

But Paul claims that through the weak and foolish means of *preaching*
the glory of God is revealed from faith to faith.

Verses 12-13 are stunning:

b. The Work of the Spirit is the Work of the Lord Jesus (3:12-18)

i. The Veil of Moses (v12-15)

¹² *Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.*

Paul and Silas and Timothy are *not like Moses* who veiled his face
so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.

We are *bold* – we are *very bold*.

Moses veiled his face, so that the Israelites would not see that the glory was fading.

We are *bold* in holding forth – boldly proclaiming – a gospel whose glory never fades.

But there was a reason why Moses veiled his face:

¹⁴ *But their minds were hardened.*

Israel in the wilderness did not understand the Law (much less the gospel!).

And Israel has remained in the wilderness:

For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.

In Paul's day, the "they" refers primarily to the Jews.

But as the centuries continued to pass,

it becomes increasingly true of people who "grew up in the church,"

whether Jew or Gentile.

The veil refers to the tendency to read according to the Letter, not according to the Spirit.

Paul had said in 3:6, that God has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant,

not of the letter but of the Spirit.

For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

If you read the OT according to the letter, rather than according to the Spirit,

then the veil remains unlifted.

In Luke 24, Jesus had shown his disciples, starting from Moses and all the Prophets,

the things concerning himself.

Jesus had reinterpreted the whole Old Testament to show how all the scriptures point to him.

When you take away the veil, then you see that the glory of Moses has completely faded.
There is no glory left.
The radiance in Moses' face is gone.

And to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts.
The veil is only taken away *through Christ*.

So naturally, we are eager to learn *how* to remove the veil!
How can we get rid of this veil that keeps us from seeing Jesus?!

This is the point of verses 16-18 – removing the veil is the work of the Spirit.

ii. Removing the Veil Is the Work of the Spirit (v16-18)

¹⁶ *But when one^[c] turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.* ¹⁷ *Now the Lord^[d] is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*

When Paul says “Lord” he is referring to the Lord Jesus.
So let me re-read this with that clarification:
When one turns to the Lord Jesus, the veil is removed.
Now the Lord Jesus is the Spirit, and the where the Spirit of the Lord Jesus is,
there is freedom.

What does Paul mean by saying that the “Lord is the Spirit”?!
Paul is making a strong statement regarding the Deity of the Holy Spirit –
and the unity of the Godhead.
He is not confusing the persons of the Son and the Spirit.
But he is identifying the *work* of the Spirit with the *work* of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus had promised that even after he ascended to the Father
he himself would be with his disciples –
“I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”
How is the Lord Jesus present with his disciples?
Jesus comes to us in the person of the Holy Spirit.
The Holy Spirit – the one Jesus identifies as the “other comforter” –
is the presence of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ with his church.

The Lord is the Spirit.
The same Holy Spirit who came upon Jesus in his baptism,
and so anointed and filled Jesus – empowering him to fulfill his earthly ministry –
that Spirit is the one who brings the presence of the resurrected Jesus
to be with his people forever.

That's why Paul says that when you turn to the Lord the veil is removed.
Because the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is – there is freedom!

What the Law could not do because it was weak – because it was passing away –

God has done in his Son – Jesus Christ!

The religions of the world offer intellectual accounts of why the world is the way it is.
And they urge people to live better, try harder, just do a little bit more.

Paul will have none of that!

All the glory of the world's religions is passing away.
But here, in history, Jesus Christ was raised from the dead –
and poured out his Holy Spirit upon his people,
so that they might no longer be slaves to sin and death.
Where the Spirit of the Lord is – there is freedom.

There is freedom!

The letter kills but the Spirit gives life.
The law – apart from the Spirit – imprisons and chains and enslaves.
The law holds everything captive until the coming of Christ.

Where can you find real *freedom*?
Only where the Spirit of the Lord is!

What kind of freedom is Paul talking about?

Well, start with Moses.

God had said that no one can see his face and live.
But now we, with unveiled face, behold the glory of the Lord!

We come into the heavenly Holy of Holies in Jesus.
Now, when the old covenant is read
we see Jesus!
Now, when the scriptures are preached
we see Jesus!

Real freedom is freedom from the *guilt* of sin.
God no longer holds your sin against you!
Real freedom is freedom from the *power* of sin.
God gives you the grace to walk in newness of life!
Real freedom is found in *access* into the heavenly holy of holies!

The Law kept you *outside* – watching as the high priest went into the holy places.
But Jesus brings *freedom*.
Jesus brings you into the holy of holies – he brings you to the Father!

How does Jesus do this?

Remember that Paul is talking about preaching.

Paul is contrasting the preaching ministry of himself and his traveling presbytery
with that of Moses (and those who do not preach Christ).

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
How do you know where the Spirit of the Lord is?
Well, wherever the scriptures are preached with Jesus at the center –
with the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus at the center –
there is the Lord who is the Spirit.

And notice what happens when this sort of preaching takes place:

¹⁸ *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,^[e] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.*

When the veil is taken away – and we behold the glory of the Lord –
when we see Jesus – when we see him to whom all the scriptures point –
we are transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

We are *transformed*.

The word “metamorphoo” is where we get our word “metamorphosis.”
It means “to change in a manner visible to others” – to be “transfigured.”
It is used of Jesus in his transfiguration in the gospels (Matt 17 and Mark 9).
And Paul uses it in Romans 12
to speak of how we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Think of the metamorphosis of the caterpillar into a butterfly –
or how metamorphic rock is transformed from one form to another.

The point in metamorphosis – the point in transformation –
is that something that is *visibly* in one form or condition
is “transformed” into another form or condition (the *form* changes).

Christ became all that we are by nature, so that we might become all that he is by grace!

I want you to think for a moment about what this means:

“we...are being transformed into the same image.”

What image is that?

Paul is talking about Jesus.

(4:4 – where Paul refers to “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,
who is the image of God.”)

In the beginning God created Adam in his own image and likeness.

Sinclair Ferguson points out “As the image of God,
man was created to reflect, express and participate in the glory of God,
in miniature, creaturely form.”

But all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Because of sin, the image of God in man is marred –

we no longer resemble God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

We have become distorted by sin.

But we are now *transformed* into the image of Christ.
We *were* in the image of Adam – the fallen man – dead in our sins.
But we are now in the image of Christ – the resurrected man –
who sits in glory at the right hand of the Father.

And Paul says that as we behold the glory of the Lord Jesus in the preaching of the gospel
we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

Again, think of Moses.

Moses beheld the glory of the Lord – and his face became radiant.
If that is true for Moses – with a fading glory that came to an end –
how much more is it the case that those who behold the glory of Jesus
are transformed from glory to glory –
a glory that continues to grow and shine more and more brilliantly
as the years go by!

I think all of us can think of examples of people who were visibly transformed by the gospel –
people whose faces had been hard and broken –

but who were softened and renewed by the hope that is ours in Jesus.

But the glory that Paul speaks of is not a glory that you can identify
with the eyes of the flesh.

After all, this is the *glory* of the resurrected Lord Jesus!

A glory that is seen by faith.

This is a glory that is reflected in faith, hope, and love.

A glory that is seen in acts of humility, patience, and kindness.

It *is* a visible transformation!

A transformation in the way that people talk – in the way that people live –
in the way that people deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus.

As we saw last night – in how a gang-banger becomes a deacon
who shows young people how to follow Jesus.

But while Paul says that this is what *happens* through preaching,
the work of transformation is *not* the work of the preacher:

For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

The Spirit is the coming of the resurrected Christ in glory to the hearts of his people!

This is the power of the age to come – the glory of the exalted Messiah –
now present in this hearts of his people!

As Michael Horton says,

“The Spirit’s work is what connects us here and now to Christ’s past, present, and future.”
(Horton in Guthrie, 228)

The Spirit transforms us into the image of the Son of God.

So the natural and obvious question that follows is:

2. What Does This Mean for Preaching? (4:1-6)

And there are three applications that Paul makes for preaching:

First, the open statement of the truth is what commends us in the sight of God.

Second, since it is the *Spirit* who opens the eyes of the blind,

then it is the god of this world who blinds unbelievers to the light of the gospel.

And third, what we proclaim is Jesus Christ as Lord.

a. “The Open Statement of the Truth” Commends Us (v1-2)

4:1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God,^[1] we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice^[g] cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

If the gospel is true, then you don't need gimmicks –

you don't need indirection and coming sideways to the gospel

This is why I do not encourage “friendship evangelism” –

because unbelievers can usually tell if you are only befriending them

in order to evangelize them.

If a person is my friend, then they are my friend – whether they believe the gospel or not!

Paul says “we refuse to practice cunning” –

we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.

Because in order to practice cunning, you would have to tamper with the word of God!

Paul had spoken in 2:17 of the peddlers – the “hucksters” –

who sell sub-standard items for full price.

And Paul says no – we do not operate that way!

We do not use crafty words to gather a following.

We do not say one thing, but mean another.

Rather, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience by the open statement of the truth.

In the 20th century the liberals used crafty words and cunning –

saying that they believed the gospel,

when in fact, they reinterpreted “gospel” to mean something entirely different.

They said they believed in the resurrection of Jesus –

what they meant was that Jesus died – and stayed dead –

but that the “ideas” of Jesus continued to live in the hearts of his followers.

Paul says that this is deception and trickery.

The minister of the gospel should preach clearly – with an open statement of the truth.

When we say that Jesus was raised from the dead –
we mean that God raised the body of Jesus out of the grave,
and that 40 days later, Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father.
So that *today* our Lord Jesus Christ remains fully God and fully man –
he has been glorified – he has been *transformed* by the glory of God –
but it was his *human body* that was glorified –
as the pattern and example of what he will do for us when he returns!

And really *that* is the heart of what Christian preaching is all about!

The open statement of the *truth* of the gospel –
the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done!

b. The God of This World Blinds Unbelievers to the Light (v3-4)

³ *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.* ⁴ *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

I wish I could skip verses 3-4.

I wish I could say instead, “If someone doesn’t see this, it’s my fault –
I should have done a better job of preaching.”

Now, I should say that I am very rarely satisfied with my preaching.
I have really enjoyed the last couple years,
with Jon and Blair and Joel preaching so regularly –
because it has given me the opportunity to *hear* the preaching of the Word,
which always challenges me to be a better preacher.

But do you see the problem with thinking that “it’s my fault”?

That suggests that I think that *I* can change hearts.

If only I was clearer – if only I was better – I could change the world!!!

But Paul is very clear:

when people do not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,
it is because “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.”

It might be better to say “the god of this age” –
since Satan is *not* the god of this *world!*

Satan *is* the god of this age –
“this” age is contrasted with the age to come.

All throughout this passage, Paul has been contrasting the “age of Moses”
with the “age of Christ.”

The devil ruled over “this age” because he had ensnared Adam and Eve
and usurped the authority of Adam – the image and glory of God.

And the god of this age continues to blind the minds of unbelievers –
to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,

who is the image of God.

There is no way that *I* can open your eyes to the glory of Christ.
“If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.”

As one commentator puts it (quoted in Guthrie, 239)
“the sun does not cease to be the sun although the blind do not see it.”

I hope that I never become satisfied with my preaching!
I always want to do better.
But I am not the Holy Spirit.
I cannot change your heart – I cannot open your eyes.

There is only one thing that we as preachers can do:

c. The Proclamation: the Light of the New Creation (v5-6)

⁵ *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants^[h] for Jesus' sake.*

In a culture obsessed with celebrities and famous personalities
Paul's words must take root in our hearts.

We once had a visitor who told me that he was disappointed that I didn't talk about myself.
A lot of preachers spend a lot of time talking about themselves and their experience.
And later in 2 Corinthians, we will hear Paul talk about himself and his experience!
But Paul does this as a last resort – “You drove me to it!”

And here in chapter 4, verse 5, Paul explains why.
We are not the message.
We are the messengers.

Postmodern thought says that the messenger *is* the message.
That's because our postmodern world no longer believes in Truth.
But Jesus *is* Truth.

The messenger is *not* the message.
Now that does not mean that the messenger is irrelevant!
After all, Paul says that there is a subordinate role for the messenger!

What we proclaim is *not* ourselves – but Jesus Christ as Lord
with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

For me – as for all the elders and deacons – we are your servants.
We are not your masters – we are not to “lord it over your faith.” (1:24)
That's not the way that Jesus dealt with us –
so we are not to deal with one another in this way!

But we are your servants – *for Jesus' sake*.
In the same way that we are not your lords –
you are not our lords!
Yes, Paul says, we are your servants – but only *Jesus* is Lord!

“This is the upside-down orientation of true Christian leadership.
Instead of advancing the kingdom by power, true leaders advance God’s kingdom
by sacrificial service.” (Guthrie, 243)

This is where Paul will go in the next portion of chapter 4.
The life and character of the messenger is *essential* to the message.
The messengers must live out the message –
as your servants for Jesus’ sake.

⁶ *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

That’s *not* just meaningless religious verbiage.

Paul is using a double reference in verse 6.

It’s easy to see the first reference:

“Let light shine out of darkness” – is certainly an echo of “Let there be light”
in Genesis 1.

But the phrase “light shine out of darkness” is far more closely related to Isaiah 9:2 –

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.”

Yes, Paul wants you to think of the light of creation!

But he also wants you to think of the light of the New Creation!

The God who spoke all things into existence

(you want to talk about a Big Bang? – when God said “Let there be Light” –

Bang! There was light!)

but that wasn’t the biggest bang!

The biggest bang came when that same God

raised up Jesus from the dead, and seated him in glory at his right hand!

Because now *that light* – that glory – the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ –

shines into your hearts – illumining your minds so that you might see Jesus by faith!