

Glory to Glory

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Preacher: Rev. Daniel Beilman

[0 : 00] Good morning, I'm Dan, I'm one of the pastors here at Church of the Advent. When Aaron read this passage from 2 Corinthians, I'm wondering if the same thing stuck out to you as it did for me.

It's this verse, verse 18. And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

Man, that's gorgeous, right? So beautiful. So poetic. You know, it also stuck out to me because at first glance, I don't know if it really matches my experience as a Christian.

I mean, transformed from one degree of glory to another sounds really great and extreme. Or as the King James version of this verse says, from glory to glory.

So in my spiritual life or whatever it is you want to call it, I don't think I've come anywhere near like glory, right? I mean, what is that?

[1 : 18] When I hear the word glory, I think of victory and praise and fame, but usually in the world of sports. Like for instance, yesterday, Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 59th hat trick.

He broke the all-time scoring record for soccer players in the world ever. That's glory. It's a glory, right? In the world of sports. I also think of Tom Brady, like the absolute goat who finished his career with more wins, passing yards, and passing touchdowns in any quarterback in history, seven Super Bowl wins, five MVPs.

I mean, that's a career that went from one degree of glory to another. And so when I read this verse in 2 Corinthians, I wonder, Mr. St. Paul, if I can call you that, are you really saying I'm supposed to be the equivalent, the spiritual equivalent of Tom Brady or Cristiano Ronaldo?

Like I'm supposed to be an all-star of love, patience, and joy? That doesn't match my experience, okay?

Or is my experience supposed to be like this? Is this what my life is supposed to be like? This is a painting of the resurrection of Jesus found on one of the panels of the Eisenheim altarpiece.

[2 : 37] We zoom in a little bit. We can see his face. The face of one who has conquered death and has a resurrected, glorified body. So is my life supposed to shine like this?

I'm supposed to be some kind of holy victor directing people's gaze to Jesus because of my spiritual awesomeness? I think what further complicates this is those who would definitely say this does match my experience, I do feel like this.

I mean, they're so judgmental, right? I mean, if you're being transformed into the likeness of Jesus, why am I always so tired in your presence? So my question at the start is, and we're going to hit this as we go, does this match your spiritual experience?

Does verse 18 match your experience? I'll read it one more time. We all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

So instead of like having like several points to my sermon, we're just going to actually keep addressing this verse. We're going to keep addressing this question.

[3 : 56] Does this match our spiritual experience? And actually, I think by the time we get to the end, after going through this passage, we're going to see that in one way or the other, it does. It does.

But we have a lot to work through. Paul has a lot of indicatives in this passage. I don't know if you noticed when Aaron read it. There aren't any imperatives. Do this. Don't do that.

It's all indicative. So we have a lot to go through and a lot to interpret. So let's pray. Lord, we need you.

We earlier prayed that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves, which means like we have no power in ourselves to understand your holy scriptures, to read them rightly, to apply them. So I'd ask that you would guide us, please. Help us. Help us understand. Open, Lord, your word to our hearts.

[5 : 04] Open our hearts to your word. In Jesus' name, amen. So we first need to talk about the background that Paul is talking about.

He's basing this passage on a series of chapters in the book of Exodus, chapters 32 through 34. At the beginning of chapter 32, Moses had spent a lot of time on top of Mount Sinai.

There he met with God. God gave him the Ten Commandments. It's on Mount Sinai that he ratified his covenant with Israel. He gave Moses the two tablets of the covenant law.

They were tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God. Now, meanwhile, down below at the base of the mountain, the Israelites asked Moses' brother to make them gods. Aaron collected the people's golden earrings and refashioned them into what looked like a calf, a golden calf.

And then they built an altar for the calf. They sacrificed burnt offerings and had a big party. Before Moses even made it down from the mountain, the Israelites had broken the covenant.

[6 : 13] Or one could say the covenant immediately failed in its purpose. What was the purpose of the covenant? It was to give Israel the ongoing experience of the glory of God.

And that would have purified them to become a kingdom of priests. So God expressed to Moses his intent to destroy Israel. Moses pleads for the people, reminding God of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God relented, and Moses descended from the mountain. But then Moses saw the partying that was going on right in front of the idol and smashed the tablets to pieces. But even so, Moses continues to plead to God on behalf of Israel for forgiveness and for God's presence to stay with Israel. Now the problem is, God's presence and his glory cannot dwell in the midst of Israel without destroying her. So Moses has a solution.

God, show me your glory. And God grants Moses' request. And Moses himself becomes the answer to his own prayers. The covenant is restored.

[7 : 24] Moses receives the law a second time on tablets. And Moses, with his face beaming with glory and radiance, mediates God's presence to his people.

But when Moses descends a second time down to the mountain with the tablets, his face is glowing and radiant, and the people are afraid. And Aaron and the people ask that he cover his face with a veil.

Because they're aware that God's glory spells their demise. So after speaking God's law to the people, Moses veils his face to protect the people from being destroyed.

Now on one hand, the veiling is an act of mercy. On the other, it's an act of judgment. It indicates that Israel has a hard heart. And God's glory hidden behind a veil will be unable to transform and purify Israel.

This episode is one in a long line of incidents where Israel is separated from God's glory.

Eventually, God's glory will be manifest in the most holy place, in the temple, in Jerusalem.

[8 : 35] But no one's allowed to go in there except one person one time a year. And ultimately, Israel's idolatry will result in their separation from the holy land altogether.

And they'll be sent into exile for their sin. Okay, so what do we learn from this background? Two things.

The first thing we learn is something about glory. I think we can arrive at a definition. And most scholars and pastors and theologians would agree with some form of this definition. That God's glory is his attributes made manifest in the created order.

His purity. His holiness. His goodness. His power. His transcendence. Made in some way physically manifest.

Secondly, we learn that clearly, clearly Israel needs a new covenant. It's crazy, right? God gave the terms of the covenant. Before Moses could even get down to the mountain, they had already broken the terms.

[9 : 50] And I think you and I can sympathize with Israel on this point. I mean, I know I can. Like, my Lenten fast is alcohol. I'm not doing any alcohol except on Sundays.

And it's actually, I thought, would be pretty easy for me because I hadn't been drinking much before then. I know. Maybe I should have chosen something more difficult. However, the first day of Lent,

you know, like, I know, like, all right, I'm not supposed to drink alcohol.

So what do I want to do? I mean, every night of Lent, I want to crush some beers, right? Because I know it's forbidden to me, right? As soon as something's forbidden, I want to just jump in there. So we do understand Israel.

And I think it's right that we identify with Israel here. We see her hard-heartedness. Her tendency towards idolatry. And if we're honest, we must say, there but for the grace of God go I.

Now that we've seen the background that Paul is leaning on, let's look at the first part of this passage. In verses 7 to 11, Paul is going to make what's called an a fortiori argument.

[11:00] This kind of argument moves from the lesser to the greater, saying that if something is true about the lesser, then it is certainly true about the greater.

A modern-day example would sound something like this. It is true that the average NFL quarterback is a great athlete. Therefore, it is undeniably true that Tom Brady is a great athlete.

I really don't know where all this Tom Brady love is coming from. I'm not a Tom Brady fan, but, you know, it works. So what is Paul comparing?

He's comparing Moses' ministry with his own. Moses' ministry we can call the Old Testament, excuse me, the Old Covenant, or as Paul calls it, the ministry of the letter, right?

Because God carved the law with letters using his own finger. And Paul's ministry we can call the New Covenant. This covenant was inaugurated by Jesus, both in his earthly ministry and through his death and resurrection.

[12:11] Now, two things to keep in mind are that an a fortiori argument isn't seeking to denigrate one thing in order to exalt the other. In other words, Paul is not saying that the Old Covenant is bad and the New Covenant is good.

Second, the subject matter for this comparison is what we're talking about, the glory of God. You'll hear the word glory repeated over and over in these four verses.

So we're going to put these comparisons on a chart like you can see behind me. We're going to start with verse 7. If you have your Bible in front of you, it would probably be helpful to have it open to 2 Corinthians 3, verse 7.

Or if you have an app, you can go there. You're allowed to look at your phone in church. That's nice. I usually do it too. So first, Paul's referring to Moses' ministry as the ministry of death.

Now, how is Moses' ministry the ministry of death? Well, Paul says that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory. The issue isn't with their eyes.

[13:15] The book of Exodus makes it clear that Israel could not endure God's glory because they were a quote-unquote stiff-necked people. So how much more glorious, then, is the ministry of the Spirit, which in verse 6, Paul says, brings life.

For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. The ministry of Moses is marked by Israel's inability to obey. Paul's ministry is marked by the Spirit-given ability to obey.

And what is Paul's proof? It's the lives of the Corinthians. We heard Tommy preach about this last week. Paul writes, Okay, second comparison.

Paul calls Moses' ministry the ministry of condemnation. Israel had no ability to obey. And within the framework of the old covenant, there was condemnation for such failure.

And it was God's presence, his glory, that would be the instrument of that condemnation. But with Paul's ministry, the presence of God is the instrument of salvation.

[14:35] So in one, God's presence is the instrument of condemnation. With Paul's ministry, the new covenant, the ministry of the Spirit available to us, God's presence is the instrument of salvation.

When Jesus died on the cross, listen. When Jesus died on the cross, the condemnation that we would deserve according to the Old Testament, excuse me, the Old Covenant, that condemnation is placed on Jesus.

And his righteousness is bestowed on us. As if we had obeyed every single facet of God's law. And with Christ's righteousness bestowed on us, God can dwell in our midst without destroying us.

And the Holy Spirit works in and through us to act righteously. Okay, third comparison. The ministry of Moses has been brought to an end.

How? Because it is in the new covenant that God is now revealing his glory. So this new covenant is permanent and the old has come to an end. So I think already there's some big takeaways here.

[15 : 52] Let's look at the first comparison. Many of us neglect to contemplate the work of the Spirit in our lives, right? We did this together, or at least I did it. You know, self-flagellation at the beginning of the sermon.

It's because I neglect to contemplate the work of Spirit in my days, in my weeks.

We look at our last day, our last week, and it's often our failures that stick out in our mind, right? So how often do you sit down in silence and consider the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?

How he's working in you. Times you obeyed when actually you didn't want to. Times you exhibited joy and peace when your exterior circumstances were pretty crappy.

I mean, we want God to bring these things to our mind so that we can give him thanks and praise and glory. On the other hand, look at the second comparison.

[17 : 03] Many of us are quite aware of the good things we do and wonder why everyone else isn't doing the same thing. Why can't my housemate get their act together? Why can't my church do more of the thing that I feel so passionately about?

We forget our ability to obey comes from the Holy Spirit himself. Without God living in us, without God living in us, we're powerless. Powerless to obey is the Israelites feasting around the golden calf while the Ten Commandments were being brought down from Mount Sinai.

So let's check back in on verse 18. Do we understand this verse any better? For me, yes.

Yeah. In that I don't have to be a spiritual all-star to come to him, to talk to him, to be in his presence, to behold his glory, to come to his table.

I don't have to be a spiritual Tom Brady. It's solely through what Christ gives me. Christ gives me his worth, his righteousness, his status, that I can have relationship with God, so that I can talk to him, so that his presence can be with me, so I can come to this table.

[18 : 26] Let's move on to verses 12 to 16. By the way, I noticed something. Whenever I mention Tom Brady, everyone's eyes look up like that. It's curious.

I have something very important to say at the end, and if people aren't watching, I'm just going to yell, Tom Brady! Curious. Okay, let's read this together.

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who had put a veil over his face, so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end, but their minds were hardened.

For to this day, when they read the Old Covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

As glorious as Paul's ministry was, that is, people hearing Paul's words, putting their faith in Christ, and being made alive by the Holy Spirit, not everyone responded with belief.

[19 : 34] Paul saw this as a continuation of the unbelief that occurred in Moses' day. But notice where the veil is found among Paul's contemporaries. It's not on their minds. For Paul's contemporaries, there's a veil that lies over their hearts.

And how would such a veil be removed? Well, surprisingly simple. In verse 16, we read, when one turns to the Lord. Now, there's many of you who come regularly here to Church of the Advent, but you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, and that's okay.

We have people of all kinds. Many are Christian. Quite a few aren't. And you're very welcome.

We're glad you're here. Some of you are pretty skeptical about the whole thing. Some of you are actually very curious and open to the claims of your Christian family or friends.

But either way, I think you can view these verses as an invitation. Let me ask you, do you sense there's a veil over your heart?

I mean, what is it that keeps you from turning to the Lord? Notice that last sentence doesn't say, but when one subscribes to the right propositions, the veil is lifted.

[20 : 50] Right? It's the heart. It's the will. It's the emotion. The desires. It's certainly true that one must cognitively believe certain things to be a Christian, but Paul is saying something deeper and existential must happen.

A turning to the Lord involves the heart. That is, all my desires, and it involves my will. And this is what relationship is like with a living person.

The change in my identity from bachelor to husband was more than just cognitive. I mean, I'm turning towards this woman. It involves my desires, my will, my intellect.

Jennifer isn't a set of propositions. I mean, yes, she's beautiful, lovely, kind, very forgiving. And so, with God, God is inviting you to turn to him.

He's already turned to you. To make it possible for you to turn to him, he's removed any barrier that might make you unacceptable. That happened on the cross.

[21 : 57] There's no moral bar you must reach to make yourself acceptable to turn to him. There's nothing that would disqualify you. Turning to him would sound something like this.

It's a conversation with God. You know, we would call it prayer. But it's a conversation with a person. Lord, I confess I have nothing worthy to bring to you.

As a matter of fact, I have done things that would and should disqualify me from receiving your love. So, forgive me of those things. I give my life to you. Be my king.

I surrender my life to you. I love you. Lift the veil that's over my heart and help me to believe. Give me the power to live for you.

Now, if you tell God something like this, if you truly turn to him and you become a Christian, I have to tell you, some things are going to get a lot harder.

[23 : 05] Okay? Turning to Jesus doesn't come without a cost. But as we were saying earlier, when we turn to him, God gives us himself.

He gives us his presence. He gives us his Holy Spirit. And his Spirit helps us, comforts us, and gives us power to obey him and tell others about him.

And this all brings us to where we started. Most of us in this room have prayed some kind of version of that prayer that I prayed earlier.

To us, who've prayed that prayer and have a relationship with the living God, we are given this very great promise. That we are beholding the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. We asked at the beginning, does this match my experience as a Christian? And I would say that for all of us who are Christians, whether you know it or not, it absolutely does if we understand this verse correctly.

[24 : 22] So we're going to work backwards. This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. Okay? We've seen how the new covenant surpasses the old covenant in that God makes us righteous and gives us His Spirit.

Martin Luther calls that righteousness an alien righteousness. It's a righteousness of another instilled from without. Our faith, our new life, our adoption as His children is all a gift.

And then our obedience is empowered by His Holy Spirit. Paul writes that we're being transformed from one degree of glory to another.

This doesn't mean we rack up victory after victory. Right? This means that the process of our transformation, it's just gradual. Like what it's going to look like 10 years from now is not what it looks like today.

We're not what we will be. But Paul makes another promise to us in the book of Philippians that He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion.

[25 : 30] Completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Paul writes, we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face.

In other words, like Moses, we can know God. That's what the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament say about Moses.

That he knew God, God knew him, and we can know God just like that. And he knows us face to face and he calls us friend. Now, what is the image we are slowly being transformed into?

Is it that image of, oh, not that one. Go back. Spoiler alert. Is it the image of Jesus resurrecting with like the face beaming?

Is that the image that we're being transformed into? I don't think this is the image that Paul has in mind. Jesus said in John chapter 12, when I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself.

[26 : 37] His being lifted up was not an allusion to the resurrection or his ascension. Jesus says, when he's lifted up, the image of glory that we're being slowly transformed into is this, what you saw earlier.

The crucifixion panel on the Eisenheim altarpiece. The crucifixion. This is his glory. This is the manifestation of God's attributes here on earth.

His justice, his mercy, his power, and his wisdom. When we're brought into union with Christ, we share in his sufferings. In God's mysterious economy, he meets us in our sufferings and he

transforms us through suffering.

When we're brought into union with Christ, we share in his death. Paul writes in Colossians that you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Therefore, being unified to him in his crucifixion and death, put to death what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

[27 : 50] Our repentance, our turning towards God, means crucifying our old selves. When we're brought into union with Christ, we share in his weakness.

You might think, or maybe you used to think, that it's your spiritual attractiveness that might draw people to Jesus and point people to him. It really isn't.

It's our brokenness. It's about being open. It's being open about our need for forgiveness, for healing.

That's what points to Jesus. Our transparency points to Jesus who forgives, who heals. Now, if you thought your experiences didn't match up with verse 18, that you weren't being transformed from one glory to another, you forgot that the Christian life is a series of losses about God using the times we fail to bring us closer to himself.

when you snap at your housemate or yell at your kids or disobey your parents and you mourn it, God is using that as a gateway for more intimacy with you, for you to experience his forgiveness, for you to embrace his righteousness instead of relying on your own.

[29 : 17] You don't have to go from victory to victory to get your father's attention, to get him to love you. You don't have to be an all-star.

Jesus won so you wouldn't have to. Jesus won so you wouldn't have to.

Because this is victory. This is glory. It's a paradox, right? How is this victory? How is this glory?

Those who witnessed this would not have agreed that that's victory.

That would have been shameful, embarrassing. Charles Spurgeon in a sermon about a verse I alluded to earlier when Jesus says, when I am lifted up, when I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself, all men to myself.

He meditates on the crucifixion as being Jesus' moment of glory, about being his moment of triumph. And I'm going to read part of this sermon for you.

[30 : 35] Let's go to the next slide. Christ looked upon his crucifixion with the eye of firm faith as the hour of triumph. His disciples thought that the cross would be a degradation.

Christ looked through the outward and visible and beheld the spiritual. The cross said Jesus.

This is Spurgeon imagining Jesus from the cross talking. The cross said he, the gibbet of my doom the gibbet is a gallows. The gibbet of my doom may seem to be cursed with ignominy and the world shall stand round and hiss at the crucified.

My name be forever dishonored as one who died upon the tree. And cavalers and scoffers may forever throw this in the teeth of my friends that I died with the malefactor.

But I look not at the cross as you do. I know its ignominy but I despise the shame.

[31 : 54] I am prepared to endure it all. I look upon the cross as the gate of triumph as the portal of victory. Oh shall I tell you what I shall behold upon the cross just when mine eye is swimming with the last tear when my heart is palpitating with its last pang just when my body is rent with its last thrill of anguish then mine eye shall see the head of the dragon broken it shall see hell's towers dismantled and its castle fallen mine eye shall see my seed eternally saved I shall behold the ransomed coming from their prison houses in that last moment of my doom when my mouth is just preparing for its last cry of it is finished I shall behold the year of my redeemed come I shall shout my triumph in the delivery of all my beloved

I and I shall see then the world mine own earth conquered and usurpers all dethroned and I shall behold envision the glories of the latter days when I shall sit upon the throne of my father David and judge of the earth attended with the pomp of angels and the shouts of my beloved Spurgeon goes on and says yes Christ saw in his cross the victories of it therefore he panted and longed for it as the place of victory and the means of conquest Christ puts his crucifixion as being his glory in name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit amen lord would we know this lord when we get discouraged about how we keep tripping over the same stumbling block how we lose patience with those we love the most lord when we feel pulled towards our old addictions lord when we are suffering when we are enduring loneliness pain sickness disease lord would you bring this verse to mind would you fill us with hope and comfort remind us that you're transforming us into something

more like yourself lord because we want to know your glory we want to see your glory and lord by your grace may we show forth your glory
Jesus thank you for dying on the cross for our sins Jesus thank you for giving us your own righteousness father thank you for accepting us as your sons and daughters and making us heirs to your kingdom and giving us eternal life we pray in Jesus name amen