

What Is God's Intended Purpose For Humanity ? - Behold Him

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[0 : 00] Lord we thank you for this time that we've had together to encourage one another in your! to speak your word and sing your word and to set our minds on things that are above where! Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

And I thank you for the reading of your word from Exodus 34. May you by your spirit speak to our hearts this morning that we might behold the glory of God in the face of Christ.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well thank you brother for reading God's word earlier and if you still have Exodus 34 just keep your thumb in it. Today we're focusing on the purpose that God intended for humanity that we should behold him. That we should see and reflect his glory. Last week we looked at the purpose to know God and to remember God and this morning we're looking at the purpose to behold God. That humans were created to behold their maker. To see his glory and reflect his glory. And so on the one hand there's Moses who wants to see God's glory and he asks for it and in many ways he acts like he wants it more than anything else. And then on the other hand there are the Israelites who cannot come near God because of their sinfulness and who in many ways act like they don't want to see more of God. But if God intends for humans to know him and to remember him and to see and reflect his glory then what is God doing in this chapter to that end? Well firstly he renews his covenant with Israel and writes the law on stone tablets which includes the revelation of his name and his character. He is doing that for the purpose that people would know him. They would know his name and character. And secondly he gives them sabbaths and feasts and patterns so that they would remember his ways and works. And thirdly he allows their faithful leader Moses to see his glory and for that glory to then be reflected in the face of Moses his servant. These things were good but the people didn't realize that these things would be temporary.

Knowledge and revelation of God would ultimately be in our hearts by the spirit that brings life not revealed on stone by the letter which condemns. Remembering God's ways and his works would not be merely by yearly feasts and weekly sabbaths but that God would dwell with us and we would feast with him and that he would be our rest forever. And finally that we would be able to see his glory not reflected in the face of a servant which causes fear but that we would see his glory blazing forth from his son and by it be transformed. So earlier with the children we looked at how long various things last but an important aspect of what God is doing here is not just how long things last but the effect that things have on us and how long the effect lasts. So let me return to something we spoke about earlier. Sleep. How long does sleep last? Well not very long but how what is the effect that sleep has on us? If we get a good sleep it has a good effect on us. We are perhaps not as cranky. We don't have a sore head. We find it a little bit easier to be patient and love people. Sleep has a good effect on us but how long does that effect last? You see we all know what it's like when we have a lack of sleep.

So can you imagine if you went for a sleep and it energized your body for a whole year? Can you imagine that? One sleep per year was all you needed and you would never feel tired or sluggish or lack concentration for a whole year. Wouldn't that be amazing? But the effect that sleep has on us doesn't last but a day. Sleep is a gift. It helps us trust God. The world will be fine without us for a night. We're not needed. Psalm 121 says he who keeps you will not slumber. God doesn't sleep.

[5 : 10] He doesn't need it. What about medication? What kind of effect does medication have on you? Perhaps for some of you right now your medication is easing your pain. Perhaps it's allowing you to feel a little bit stronger. But how long does the effect have on us? How long does that last? Imagine you could take one tablet and it would resolve every issue in your body for an entire year. One tablet. Wouldn't that be good? Some of you take a cocktail of tablets every day and you need to take the same amount the next day. So the effect that it has on us doesn't last. How about when you do something thrilling and fun?

When was the last time you did something exhilarating that released endorphins in your body? What is that for you? What things do you do that puts a smile on your face?

The effect is a smile on your face. But how long does that smile last? Not very long. You need to do it again. Or how about maybe some of you have managed to get a wee holiday in the sun and a suntan on your skin. How long does that last? Think about this. You are sitting in a hot country and the sun, which is a star that is 93 million miles away, has an effect on your face.

for everyone to see when you come back to Peely Wally Scotland. But how long does that effect that the sun has on you? How long does that last? Give it a week or two and you're Peely Wally again.

Now if the sun, which is 93 million miles away, can affect your skin, how much more would it be for Moses standing in the blinding presence of the one who created the sun?

[7 : 18] No wonder his face was not just tanned, but it was irradiating with the afterglow of divine glory. Moses had to veil it. He didn't even know that his face was beaming.

And he had to veil it. And Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians chapter 3. And so it's not just about whether or not things last, but whether the effect that they have on us lasts. What effect does it have on us and does that last? So in this passage, what effect do letters carved on stone tablets have on the people? What effect does that have on the people and does it last? What effect does the afterglow of glory on the servant of God have? And does it last? For Moses, the effect of seeing God's glory and standing in his presence was so powerful that his face began to supernaturally shine with a divine afterglow. So powerful the effect that this had on him. Yet it didn't last. It didn't last.

For the Israelites, they have something far less intense. They don't stand before the immortal, invisible, God-only wise, and light inaccessible, hid from their eyes. They stand before the servant of God who merely reflects an afterglow of God's glory on human skin. And yet they not only were they not transformed by it, the effect that it had on them was fear and distance. We don't want to come near.

We can't look upon it. Now, despite the fact that this covenant that God made came with such a powerful glory, it didn't last. It did not last and neither could it transform people. There's all sorts of questions and discussions about what that might have been like and what it meant. It's one of those moments where I would have just loved to have been there and seen it. So many questions. Tomes of discussions and debates and books and essays. I've read some of them. And there's so many opinions and questions and discussions that we would run out of time if we were to go through them all and we would be none the wiser if we were to entertain all these ambiguities. So I don't think it is going to help us to go through all these different questions and discussions. But the destination is the same. Where we end up is what

Paul discusses in 2 Corinthians 3. And what Paul basically says is that Moses failed the glory on his face because it wasn't a lasting glory and because the minds of the people were hardened.

[10:26] They couldn't understand it. They couldn't understand it. They could not gaze upon the glory because they could not understand it. And they were both unnerved by the way that Moses was transformed and yet they did not understand that it wouldn't last. This moment of the giving of the law transformed Moses with a glory and they were unnerved by it. And they didn't understand that as transformed as he was it wouldn't last. And if you know the rest of the story you will know that this is the only time that Moses' shining face is mentioned. It's never mentioned again. Why? It's not mentioned before this. It's not mentioned afterwards in Exodus and it's not mentioned in Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy. And so why is it only mentioned here? Well because the glory is on his face is inextricably linked to the giving of the law on the stone tablets. And these stone tablets, where were they later placed? Do you remember?

They were placed in the Ark of the Covenant which was placed where? In the Holy of Holies behind a what? Behind a veil. So you get this glory on Moses' face that is veiled at the giving of the law.

And then it goes into the Holy of Holies which is filled with glory which is veiled. Isn't that interesting? The law, the man, the tabernacle, all marked with glory and all in some way veiled, all temporary in nature and all pointing to something greater. And so the effect of this covenant was not lasting. It wasn't given as the final means of redemption. And thank God because Paul calls it a ministry of death. He says that this ministry that Moses had was the ministry of death. Now why did he call it the ministry of death? Has he been unfair to Moses? No, Moses would call it the same thing. Because although it came with such glory and it was good, the law was good in and of itself. It could never save. It could only condemn. It couldn't bring righteousness. It could only point out sins. And so it only dealt with sins. It couldn't give righteousness. The law of Moses was never the final goal for humanity because it contains all these sacrifices. And if it contains all these sacrifices, that assumes a continual need for sacrifices. And so this is not God's design for humanity.

God's design for us is not that we would continually need sacrifices, which implies that we're continually sinning. You see that? So you see, just as God didn't leave Israel as slaves in Egypt, that was pointing to God's purpose that he did not want to leave humanity as slaves to sin. And so the law was given to show that Egypt was not the biggest problem. If you think that living as a slave under Pharaoh, the serpent king of Egypt, was bad, then the law will show the whole world what living as a slave under the true serpent, the devil, and his kingdom of darkness is like. That's why it's called the ministry of death because it shows people the reality of being slaves to sin. It's a ministry of death because it shows people the reality of being slaves to sin. Yeah, they've been rescued from Egypt, but they're still slaves to sin. And so think about this. Think about the world that we live in.

And think about these bodies we live in. And think about your daily experience, even as a Christian. The dreadful lack of unrighteousness in our world. The constant struggle for rest.

[14:50] That's where the saying comes from, no rest for the wicked. The perpetual need for sacrifice, the exhausting pull towards selfishness and sinfulness, and the fearful hopelessness of death.

All of these things in our world. Dreadful lack of righteousness, constant struggle for rest, perpetual need for a sacrifice, perpetual need for a sacrifice, exhausting pull of selfishness and sinfulness, and fearful hopelessness of death. Yet God gave the law with such great glory that Moses was transfigured.

It wouldn't last, and it wouldn't transform the people, but it was a sign of something greater to come. The glory would not last on Moses, because it didn't come from him. And he would die.

Yet one was coming who wouldn't just be a servant of God, transfigured with an afterglow on his face, but the very Son of God being fully transfigured. So much so, think about the transfiguration.

It's not just his face. And clothes cannot veil it. Even his clothes are shining with the light. Because unlike Moses, who was not the source of the light on his face, Christ himself is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

[16 : 20] The light that comes from him comes from the very source of all light and life. And so, Moses told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 18, he said this, The Lord said to me, I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. And what does Jesus himself say in John 12, 49?

He says, For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak. He is the prophet that Moses spoke about.

And when Moses said to the people, There's a prophet going to arise, and you should listen to him. What do we hear God say when Moses is standing next to Jesus, and Jesus is the one being transfigured in the midst of a bright cloud of glory?

What is it God says? He says, This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. Does he say, Listen to Moses? He says, Listen to him.

[17 : 44] Listen to him. And then Moses and Elijah disappear. The law and the prophets, pale in comparison to the Son of God.

Jesus is the only one left. He is the one who lasts. It is his glory that remains. And not only that, his glory is the only glory that transforms.

And so while Moses was a temporary servant, Jesus is the eternal Son of God. While Moses' face shone with the afterglow, Jesus himself is the radiance of the glory of God in his whole being.

While Moses' glory faded, Jesus' glory never fades. While the law was given in letters carved on stone, the word of God came in flesh.

And the Spirit writes the law on the heart. While the law could only condemn, Jesus came to save. And he offers his own righteousness to all who believe.

[18 : 49] While the temporary glory was veiled, Jesus tore the veil to reveal a greater and everlasting glory.

And while the people could not behold the fading glory on the face of Moses, Paul says, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

And so Paul is thinking about this very passage in Exodus 34. Look at verse 34.

Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil. And this is what Paul says, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

And so, Paul is saying, just like Moses went in before the Lord, i.e. Yahweh, he would remove the veil, so too when one turns to the Lord, i.e. Jesus, the veil is removed.

[19 : 52] And Paul goes on to say, 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 who?

Jesus Christ. Not Moses. And what effect does it have on us when God shines his light in our hearts? What is the effect that that has on us when we are able to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ?

The effect is not merely skin deep like it was for Moses. Paul says, when we, with unveiled faces, behold the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

And so the effect that God's shining his light in our hearts, that we are able to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ, the effect that has on us is that we're transformed into the image of Christ.

And does that effect last? Well, not only does it last, it increases from one degree of glory to another. Now, we're coming to the end.

[21 : 12] do we think at times it would be good to see 180 degrees all at once? Yeah?

Do you live with someone that you wish they would skip a few degrees quicker than they are? I know I live with someone who would rather that I was moving along a little bit quicker.

It is one degree to another. One degree at a time. One degree.

One degree of glory to another. Think about the movement of that. When you behold the glory of God in the face of Christ, you're only able to behold it because of the grace and mercy of God to shine his light into your hearts.

And when you behold it, you're not fearful like the Israelites. It doesn't need to be veiled. It transforms you into the same image.

[22 : 18] And not only does it transform you, it moves from one degree of glory to the next, to the next, to the next. And so be kind to one another.

Don't be impatient. If someone is looking to Christ and beholding him and fixing their eyes on him, they will be transformed by gazing on his glory.

And that transformation will be gradual. One degree to another. So two quick examples of this, okay? And then a quote and then a closing verse.

Two quick examples. Okay, consider firstly the apostles, giants of faith. these men. John said, the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory.

Glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. However, think of when they began. Think of how they began. Think of all the mistakes that were recorded in the gospels over three years.

[23 : 37] And then read what it says in Acts chapter 4 when the rulers and elders saw the wisdom and boldness of Peter and John who were uneducated and common men and they were astonished and it says they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

See what happens when you're with Jesus? Transform from one degree of glory to the next. Suddenly, you uneducated and common people are astonishing the world.

Secondly, consider Stephen in Acts chapter 6 when he was arrested and his trial suddenly became, you can compare and contrast, his trial became like the trial of Jesus where they set up false witnesses against him and yet it says when the council were gazing at Stephen they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

His face started beaming and then just before he was killed in Acts chapter 7 Stephen gazed into heaven and he saw the glory of God and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

See how those who spend time with Jesus and fix their eyes on him are transformed and it's gradual but it is moving to an ever increasing glory. Finally, consider yourself.

[25 : 12] Moses said and God said Jesus is the one we must listen to. Only Jesus can remove the veil. Only Jesus can save us and transform us.

Only his light can reveal the truth and show us God's glory. And so like the veil if your heart is not open then your eyes might as well be closed because you're not going to understand anything you see.

And history is not short of people making excuses to explain away the reality that they refuse to face and the truth they refuse to believe. I don't know if you've been there but I've been there refusing to believe the truth in front of me the reality around me making every excuse but the truth is everything in this room and everything we presently see is fading and temporary but there is a reality that is more real and more glorious than we can fathom a reality that will never fade and never pass away a reality with Christ that will last forever and will surpass anything glorious that this world could ever offer and so the more that we behold Christ the less we will be filled by the temporary world around us and the more we will see the glory to come that both transforms our being and lasts forever.

So let me give you a quote from a Glasgow born Baptist preacher and commentator Alexander McLaren he says this don't think that it is finished with you Jesus is transforming you from one degree to the next and he says this life is not long enough for it don't be complacent over the partial transformation which you have felt there is but a fragment of the great image yet to reproduce in your soul a faint outline dimly traced many a feature wrongly drawn with many a line still needed before it can be called even approximately complete see to it that you neither turn away your gaze nor relax your efforts till all that you have beheld in Christ is repeated in you and so this life is not long enough for it it's dimly traced many a feature wrongly drawn many a line still needed and lastly verse

John the apostle said what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is and finally Peter John's friend says that he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith though now for a little while if necessary you have been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ though you have not seen him you love him though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with what with glory obtaining the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls let me pray

[29 : 16] Lord we thank you for these truths this reminder that this world is fading away and all of these temporary things let us not be filled by them but let us turn our eyes upon Jesus let us fix our gaze upon the glory in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord and may you transform us ever increasing from one degree of glory to the next so that we might be hold you in all your glory and we might be like you Lord we pray these things for your glory and for our good in Jesus name Amen Amen