

“Glorious Beholding”

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[0 : 00] arrogance to try to cover so much in one section, but I have really loved taking the time with these verses, and I've found a lot of wonderful truths that we may not have had revealed if we had tried to cover so much in such a limited space. So I praise God for his providence in bringing this to pass. By the way, you'll find 2 Corinthians on page 1777 in the Pew Bible. This sermon is titled Glorious Beholding. Behold. It's a good strong word. It's kind of sad that we don't use it that much anymore. Behold, my new haircut. Behold, we now have announcements up on the slides.

Behold, the bulletins have a prayer list. Things would feel a bit more exciting if we use that more often. You can try to bring it back. I'm not bold enough for that. Let me know how it works for you. But the word behold has this idea of your gaze being locked in on something, that it is captured. It's like you're beholden, you're held looking at that thing. You're staring at it. It has captured you. It has captivated you. Behold. Today's sermon is about beholding. Let us turn to the text, the last verse of chapter 3, 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 18.

I want you, because of this word today, to be motivated to use all of your freedom, to boldly behold the glory of God and be transformed thereby. That is the point of the sermon laid out clearly before you, that you are to use your freedom to boldly behold the glory of God and be transformed thereby. So without further ado, point number one, bold beholding.

[2 : 50] A lot of alliteration today. Tongue twisters. I used to practice those. When we have been, what we have been talking through over the past couple weeks is this idea of boldness, of freedom, of the liberty we have in Christ to draw near.

And even though we've spent two sermons covering this, and it's been touched on in sermons even before that, it's still worth taking some time to remember the freedom we have and the bold right we have to approach our Father.

Because we are always, as sinners, as humble creatures, tempted to believe that God stands far off from us, unapproachable, distant, and unknowable.

And so I always want to lay before you the beautiful truth that this God, finite, infinite, great, all-powerful, so far above you, makes himself available for you to come and see him whenever you need.

We are free to draw near to our God. If that is true, we must take every advantage we have to peer into the things of God.

[4 : 26] We all, with unveiled face, that means you are free to stare into God's glory. Before there was a curtain.

That curtain was a picture of your sin and the separation that it makes between you and God. That God is holy, that sinners cannot enter into his presence.

That veil, that curtain, is a picture of us being unfit to see God's glory. But because we are unveiled, because our sins are washed away in Christ, we are free to draw near.

That means that you are free in Christ to stare into God's glory. Think about a husband and a wife. No one would think it odd for a husband to stare at his wife, to gaze longingly at her. If anything, it shows his love, his affection, that he would be pleased to do that.

[5 : 39] But if I was on the street staring at a random woman, it'd be considered creepy. See how the context makes a big difference there?

The relationship gives certain freedoms that aren't free other places. Before, when you were apart from God, you could not look at his beauty.

It was not for you. Just like a person's on the street's beauty is not for me to stare at. But in the same way, before you were a Christian, before you repented, you had no right to stare into God's beauty and goodness.

You were his enemy. What right did you have to be pleased by seeing his wonder? Yet now that we have the Spirit, if you have repented, you are free to drink it in.

You are free to look deeply into the glory of God. Listen to how Jesus highlights the close relationship his disciples have with him and the freedom they have to access.

[7 : 00] John 15, 13 through 17. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends.

For all things that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain and that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give you.

These things I command you, that you love one another. See, he calls us friends. And that friendship means that we have access into the hidden things.

Like the access that a husband and wife have to be close to each other and personal with each other and vulnerable with each other. So too, in the Spirit, we have access to our God.

[8 : 26] We have a privilege to look at his glory, to stare deeply into all of his beauty. He loves us.

If Christ died to set you free, and I'll tell you for free that he did, if where the Spirit is, as we read earlier, there is freedom, and I'll tell you, that is true, and if God loves us like he loves his beloved Son, and I'll tell you that he does, then, then we should draw near with confidence.

nothing shall separate us from the love of God. We should be eager to boldly look into the things of God, into his glory, and to behold all of his wonder, because it is for you.

You should be bold to go after God and to see all of his beauty, because you are married to him.

You are his friend.

He has saved you and sent his Spirit to you. You live in a special relationship with God, where you are meant to stare at his wonder, because Christ has given you free access to all of his glory and perfection.

[10 : 03] There's a lot of application we've covered, but just a specific application to help you really drive this deep. Special application one, read his word.

Before, apart from Christ, this book is a death sentence to you. It condemns you for your sin. If you read this and you have not repented, it should be a crushing burden as you stare down all of the crimes it reveals.

But praise God, that is not us. We have been cleansed and freed.

And so all the punishment that threatened us in this book, is gone because Jesus has taken it. If you are a believer, you now have access to this book in a way that you never had before.

You have the Spirit to make it plain to you. And before, when this book threatened your life, now it gives you life. You know, you know, you know, we all know about amusement parks like Six Flags or Disney World.

[11 : 23] Water Country. Water Country. We know that they have special season passes. If you get gifted a season pass and you never use it, what good is it to you?

But what we do when we get something like that is we take every opportunity. I'm going to get the most money possible for this. I'm there every week, you know.

You have the season pass to the Bible. The free access to the truth and the riches of wealth here. Don't just let it sit on a shelf and collect dust, but go and get the treasure because it's already been paid for and you have free access to it. Read with boldness knowing that Christ has taken all the curses of this book away from you and you have free access to all of its treasure.

Point number two, glorious gazing. There's a lot of stuff to look at in the world where visual people, you know, we're naturally drawn.

[12 : 33] You know, we've got billboards and flashy signs and all sorts of things to catch our attention. One of my favorite things to look at is castles.

Just, I get pictures of them on my Facebook feed and I'll just stare at them. And I've gotten the privilege to see just a couple in my life and I would love to see many more, but I love looking at castles.

They are grand. They are imposing. Majestic. They've got this beautiful functionality to them, that they were designed to be very purposeful.

I wish that, like, America had medieval ages so that we had castles around here, but, you know, unfortunately we don't. But, we gaze at things because of their beauty, of their quality. And when we gaze at things, there's a sweet sort of pleasure in looking at them. As we stare at a beautiful thing, at a glorious thing, it satisfies something within us, something God-given that is meant to take in the breathtaking, to be captivated with beauty and with glory and to have joy at simply the witnessing of something wonderful.

[14:11] Consider sunrises and sunsets. Are they not beautiful? What do we get by watching these?

You know, I've woken up early in the morning from time to time just to go out and watch the sunrise over the ocean or something. What do we get out of it save the pleasure of gazing at beauty? And that's enough. That's wonderful. Here today we are speaking of the thing that is the most beautiful, of the best thing to gaze at and behold, God himself.

Do you realize that everything everything that is beautiful, everything that is truly beautiful is a reflection of his glory and is meant to point you towards him?

That every beauty he has put in this created world is meant to make you think of the God who is so beautiful to have created such a thing.

[15:21] every beauty is a reflection of his glory. And what is grander than our God? Just as a little castle figurine is trivial compared to the real deal, so too the things of this world, their glory is nothing compared to God.

consider what is bigger than God. You know, a lot of the things we are captivated by are massive. Skyscrapers, mountains, oceans, the Grand Canyon, redwood trees, these are all massive things that captivate us by their size.

do not realize that God is so infinite that there is no place in the world that he does not fill. Consider the vast expanse of the galaxy.

Our Milky Way is a hundred thousand light years across. Light travels so absurdly fast.

I've never seen light move. It's just faster than a bullet. But it takes a hundred thousand years for it to cross the galaxy and the galaxy is just a small part of the universe and God holds it in his hand and fills all of it.

[17:00] What is grander than that? strength? Or what about strength? We marvel at formidable things, strong things. I don't know if you've ever seen a strongmen contest and the big stones that they lift up or all sorts of different feats of strength, the fun fair game with the hammer that you knock the bell up with.

The things we marvel at, the impressive strength of certain things. Should we marvel at God for strength?

No. We should. Oh yeah, we should. He's almighty. Amen. He has the power to raise the dead. I haven't seen any man from working out ever raise a single dead body. He has the power to still the storm.

We hear Jesus rebuke the wind and it's silent. He has the power to speak and create worlds and peoples.

[18:16] He said, let there be light and there was light. strength. Have you have you ever seen someone with strength like that?

This is an amazing God. Be in awe of his glory or consider the glory of his wonderful character. We've considered his vastness, his strength. What about his character? have you ever known a person that was so impressively good that you were just pleased to be their friend?

Like, oh, it's just a privilege to know this guy or this girl. They're wonderful. They're so sweet that it's just a joy to watch them live out their life and do the good things that they do.

A good friend of mine passed away last week. He was a faithful believer and it was a wonderful thing to watch him stare his death down and rejoice in the Lord.

[19:32] His character was beautiful and it was pleasing to look at. Look at this God. Behold him.

See his character and be in awe. who loves like this God. He planned from before creation to love sinners who would hate him and to save them from their sins at the price of his very own son.

He sacrificed his son for rebels and sinners for liars, thieves, adulterers, selfish slanderers.

For you and for me. Who loves like that? Look at the humility of his character. He is so far above us in station, yet he is gentle and kind and compassionate.

Luke 12:7 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.

[20:57] Do you know how many hairs are on your head? No. A lot. A lot. That's my own head and I don't have a count of those things.

And yet God, the infinite creator, the one who everything was created to glorify, he knows the number of hairs on every one of your heads.

That is how carefully he cares for you and pays attention to you. He does not look down and scoff at you, but he brings himself to your level.

I love watching one pastor I know, a man named Ed Moore down in New York City. He loves kids. He's great with them. And he just, he gets down on their level.

He gets real close to them. And he just, he's so kind to them. This is the sort of quality that our God has. He condescends to us, not in an arrogant way, but he gets on our level.

[21:59] He's found in the form of a baby, to save us. Consider the character of someone that humble, or consider his compassion, Psalm 103, 11 through 17.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy to those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust.

As for man, his days are like grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourishes, for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children.

[23:09] This is our glorious God. Boldly look at him and be amazed. These are just three aspects of his glory, his vastness, his power, his character.

it goes on and on. Drink deep of the pleasures of witnessing this God. Don't be captivated by the world and everything going on out there, but lock your eyes on him.

Refuse to take them away. Refuse to look at anything inferior. Fear. but notice that even though we have free access, we do not yet see face to face.

The verse says, we behold as in a mirror. A mirror is a good image. You look at one and it gives you a good picture of what's going on, but we all know that a mirror is not a substitute for the real thing. If you touch a mirror, it feels nothing like touching the object reflected. reflected, we see God this way, reflected.

[24:38] One day we will see him face to face, but right now, we see a reflection of it. It's a real image, not a lie or a trick or an illusion, but it is just a reflection.

As wonderful as everything we see of him is now, it is sweet to remember that one day we will see him so much better than we see now.

One day we will see face to face. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13, Paul says, now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, and we will fully know as we're fully known.

we should rejoice at his glory now and eagerly await the coming day of glory, where face to face we will see the glory of God.

Yet while we wait, how do we see his glory? Since we cannot see face to face, what is this mirror that we are gazing at?

[26:01] The answer is ultimately mankind and Christ. There are many things in creation that reflect God's glory, but at the center of his creation, at the crown of it, he put mankind as a reflection of who he is.

God's that is why in Genesis we read, let us make man in our own image.

That is God speaking of his purpose for creating man. Man is an image bearer. You are image bearers of God. You are made to be the main way that God reflects his glory is in people seeing you.

I mean, consider how impressive humans are to anything else in creation. What animal even slightly compares with what humanity has achieved?

No animal has language like human beings do. No animal is building skyscrapers. No animal has expanded to live in every climate in every place.

[27:23] You don't see gorillas hopping in submarines and going to the bottom of the ocean. Nor do you see fish climbing Mount Everest. We are meant to be a reflection of the glory of God.

We are at the crown of his creation. Unfortunately, that image became tarnished. when we sinned, we stopped reflecting God in the most important way, in purity, in holiness.

When mankind fell, its ability to reflect God was tainted and tarnished. But there was one man who came, who perfectly reflected the Father.

Jesus says, he who has seen me has seen the Father, like our brother was reading in John 14 earlier, the way in which God reveals himself in Christ.

Jesus is the perfect image bearer of God, the perfect reflection. He is exactly what we were supposed to be. and the Holy Spirit is sent to us to show us Jesus.

[28 : 49] And Jesus is the perfect mirror of the Father. So by the Spirit we've been given, we commune with our Savior, and in him the glory of God is reflected to us.

so we should rely on this Spirit that we have been given so that we may see Christ.

Through prayer, through the reading of the Bible, through many means, be in step with the Spirit you've been given, and search by the Spirit to see Christ, and in seeing Christ, look to see the reflection of the Father, and by doing so you have fellowship with the Creator of the Universe, and you peer into the secret things of his glory, things angels have longed to look into.

By these things you will see reflections and images of the perfect, beautiful glory of God. We should regularly use these means to behold our God, to stay locked in on him.

be transfixed by his glory. Gaze longingly at your Savior, like a bride gazes at her groom, groom.

[30 : 20] Or gaze at him like a toddler gazes at a piece of cake with desire and intensity. nothing else matters if I can just have that.

Let Christ be like that to you. That's childlike faith there. Let all the lesser beauties that would try to distract you fall by the wayside.

You know, think about a newborn father. I don't know if you've ever had the privilege of meeting someone who's a father for the first time and they're holding their baby and they're just obsessed. Like, nothing else matters. Like, look at this baby. It's so incredible. Be like that with Christ. Be so amazed at your Savior.

Like, there's nothing else you'd rather look at in the world because nothing is beautiful like he is. no longer fix your gaze at the inferior world, but gaze at the perfect God.

[31 : 33] Specific application number two, fellowship with serious believers. Fellowship with people who are serious about their walk with God.

Some of them may have just been saved, some of them may have been saved for 30 years. seek them out, the people who are serious about the words in this book and about living them out.

One of the clearest reflections of God's glory is seeing his spirit work in the lives of believers.

One of the strongest ways my faith has been built over the years is watching God sanctify, make righteous sinners, who he has called to himself, or hearing testimonies of repentance of how God has converted people out of darkness and brought them to light.

One of the ways my faith has been built most clearly is by fellowshiping with other people who are serious about God, and in them I have seen reflections of the glory of God, as they are cleansed from sin and made fit to be mirrors of God, true image bearers.

[32 : 55] Connect yourself to serious believers. Reach out and say, hey, I'd love to meet up for a meal sometime, or to give you a call, can I have your number please?

Could we maybe meet up and study the Bible together? The people who do that see God's glory frequently. They are shaped by good examples and are encouraged by others in following the same God.

Proverbs 27, 17, as iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. Believers on believers building each other up in Christ, or Hebrews 13, 7, read at the funeral of my friend yesterday.

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct, or more clearly, follow their faith as you look at the outcome of their life.

My brother is in glory now, and I pray that God would make me into a man like him, so that I might reach there proudly like he is now.

[34 : 20] Point number three, truly transforming. We had boldly beholding and glorious gazing, and now truly transforming.

Are you content the way you are? Do you have a desire to be better than the state you're in? Not better financially or physically, but spiritually, more like Christ?

Do you realize that not growing is the biblical equivalent of being dead? You know, you look at a tree, and it still has branches on it, but those branches are dead.

How do you know? They've stopped growing. They don't produce fruit. They don't produce leaves. They're still on the tree. They look like they're part of the church and like they're Christians, but they don't produce fruit, and they're not growing, and so they're dead and ready to be cut off.

besides that, besides the fact that if you're not growing, you are functionally dead, every sin and worldliness that you cling to is one less bit of God's glory and goodness that you enjoy.

[35 : 47] We do not follow rigid rules for no reason, but the instructions we get in this book are for our good.

Sin is never better than obedience. Wickedness is never better than righteousness. You never are better off because you've given into sin, and you are always better off if you choose to obey Christ. Every lack of righteousness that you tolerate is that much more suffering that you experience. So if we want to change, how do we change?

If we want to change, what should we do? Are we to say to ourselves, I'm going to be better at this. Next time, I won't let this happen the same way. Do we need the spiritual equivalent of protein powder in a workout regimen? You know?

[36 : 56] Okay, up at 3 a.m. every day, push-ups, run a mile, you know, these things. Do we need the spiritual equivalent of that? No.

God's way is much better. It's easier too, and it's sweeter. there's such a peace to the way that God would have you grow to be more like Christ.

Look. Just look. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face, and the things of the earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Worldly religion is like that bodybuilding program. It's all about looking inward, looking at yourself and what you want to achieve.

It's all about ironclad self-discipline and white-knuckled self-righteousness. but Christ has a better way. Gaze at what is good and be transformed to be like it.

[38 : 19] You are what you look at. Look at how the verse shows this pattern. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.

If you look at yourself, you will only ever be a wretched sinner. If you look to others for your standards, if you say to yourself, I'm better than those people, you will only ever be just another man or woman in the rabbit race of people trying to wash off their filth in a river of mud.

But if you look to Christ, you will be transformed to be like your father in heaven. What we look at shapes us.

a woman who looks at the kindness of her friend becomes sweeter by following her example. A son who looks out at the stable care of his father grows up to become a good man.

On the other hand, a man who looks at porn becomes crude. food. A woman who looks at others' wealth becomes envious.

[39 : 55] What you look at transforms you. More than what you believe or say you believe, what you look at transforms you.

You can talk about being a Christian till you're blue in the face. if you never look like Christ, you will be just as filthy as the world is.

If you have Christ and you never gaze at him, I would not be surprised to find you looking like everyone else.

But if you cannot get enough of his beauty, if you cannot but help but to stare at it, to be locked into it, then Christ's beauty will be found to radiate out of you without even trying.

If you stare at Jesus, you will become like him without any of that white-knuckled determination or that self-righteousness. But just staring at Christ, you will be transformed into his image.

[41 : 09] Matthew 6 verses 22 and 23, Jesus says, the lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, that is what you look at, your whole body will be full of light.

But if your eye is bad, the whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness?

Turn from it and look to what is beautiful. special application number three, find one thing that you gaze at instead of Christ and get rid of it.

One thing that is tempting you to put your attention on it, maybe it's TV or shopping or surfing the web, social media of some form.

brothers, if you lose that and you gain more time with Christ, it will be well worth it. Maybe it's something that keeps you from fellowshiping with others.

[42 : 22] Maybe you can't stand to feel awkward in a situation, so you never reach out to someone. Maybe your schedule is too busy to talk to others.

That's what's standing in the way of you seeing the glory of Christ manifest in people's lives. You need to come to church, you get your fix, and then you get going. Or maybe you're worried about sin in your life.

If I let people know me, they're going to see the ways that I'm messed up. What will they say? What will they think? I want you to know that it's worth it to be awkward if it means seeing more of Christ. Myself, I used to have social anxiety and really struggle to approach people. I missed out on so much. But in wanting to be a pastor, I learned to push through a lot of that.

And you know what I found? The people of God are wonderful. And the Spirit of God is within them. And it is a joy to get to talk to them.

[43 : 33] And I become more like Christ as I do so. I want you to know if you're worried about what others will think, that the people who really love Christ will be gentle with your sins and your weaknesses and your failures.

They will treat you like Christ would treat you. They will be gentle with you. encourage you to be out of your sins for your own good and for God's glory.

And they will rejoice over repentance and humility. I want you to find something that gets in the way of seeing Christ.

Get rid of it and see if it really is worth what I'm saying it's worth. In closing, we have looked at our freedom to boldly look.

So take full advantage of the privilege that you have as saints and children of God. We have looked at the glory that we get to gaze at, the vastness, the power, and the character of God that is beautiful beyond compare.

[44 : 51] Remember that it is pleasing and wonderful to stare at a powerful, loving God, perfect in every way.

And finally, we learned that the way to be transformed is to stare at Jesus. Isaiah 45, 22. Look to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.

Amen. Let us close in prayer. God, give us a revelation of Christ today and every day that we might never know the lack of your glory, but see it reflected in all your manifold ways, least of all in creation, secondly, in your people, and most of all, in your beloved Son, our Savior, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Thank you.