

"A More Glorious Covenant"

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[0 : 00] Technology, wonderful and terrible, all at the same time. You'll find 2 Corinthians chapter 3 on page 1776 in the Pew Bibles.

This sermon is titled, Hidden Glory. And I want you to picture this with me if you would. You're standing at the base of a mountain.

A cloud descends onto the mountaintop. You hear the very voice of God thunder from the midst of that cloud out into your presence.

As if stones crashing down on top of each other, this grand voice booming out. And you see from that cloud, a man come down with shining face.

Like radiant, like you've never seen before. And with him, he brings the words of God carved on tablets of stone.

[1 : 13] I mean, that would be incredible to see, right? I mean, wow. Like to see that would be unbelievable.

A glorious sight. But what if I told you that a guy from a backwater town with no education is walking around and talking to people about God?

Oh, here it is. What if I told you that that man was more glorious than the man who came down from the mountain? Would you believe me?

Would you draw your focus away from the man with the shining face to the backwater uneducated man wandering around?

Could you take your eyes off of the spectacular to look at what seems ordinary? See, all of our hearts are tempted at times to want flashy things.

[2 : 26] To prefer the things that are spectacular, even if they're not the best. So that's why today we need the truths that we are going to be studying in the passage in 2 Corinthians.

We need to hear that we are part of something grand and glorious, even if on the outside it looks ordinary. So read with me in 2 Corinthians 3, verses 7 through 11, and think on this, the comparison between things that are outwardly glorious.

And the ordinary and how God works. Starting in verse 7. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses, because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away.

How will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

[4 : 06] I pray that the Lord would have his blessing be upon the preaching of the word today. This is a complicated passage to understand in some senses.

We do not always think of things in covenants. I hope you were with us last week as we looked at covenants and talked through what that is.

But to remind you, it is a relational agreement between two parties of people. Different from a contract. It is more personal. It goes deeper.

It goes beyond the letter to the heart of matters. Paul, last week, ended the section by saying that the letter kills and the Holy Spirit gives life.

And we match those up to the new covenant and the old covenant. The old covenant is the letter of the law, which kills by condemning people.

[5 : 10] And the Spirit gives life in the new covenant by making people alive again in Christ. In the passage we just read, Paul continues to explain how much greater the new covenant is than the old covenant.

So today as we work through this, there will be two points to the outline. Point one, the old covenant and flashy glory.

And point two, the new covenant and hidden glory. But before we start on point one, I do want to give a brief note about this passage.

It's a particularly difficult passage to translate from the Greek. I've been very pleased with how the New King James Version translates most of the passages we've studied with just minor things that I've noticed weren't quite as fitting to the Greek text.

But this passage had a fair number of issues with how it was translated. Unfortunately, we don't have time to go into all of the details of that.

[6 : 26] But as I'm preaching, if you notice, things are slightly off from how the text is presenting it. It's because I'm trying to work closer to the original Greek meaning of the text.

And I will try to point this out where possible. But we don't have time for all of the textual and translational difficulties. So point number one, the old covenant and flashy glory.

You may have heard it said that not all that glitters is gold. Or you cannot judge a book by its cover. And sometimes we make much ado about what is in fact nothing.

The old covenant glitters and the front cover, if you were to buy it in the store, is breathtaking and eye-catching. And we are often tempted to put all of our emphasis on something so breathtaking.

In the scripture reading from earlier and in the text here, we are reminded that when the old covenant arrived, it came in glory.

[7 : 43] In spectacular glory. Glory is this quality of grandeur or grandness. It is this sense of significance to a thing.

Something glorious is something impactful. In the Old Testament, the word that is translated glory literally means weight or weightiness.

You think of if you drop something heavy, it has an impact. This is the idea of glory. Weighty things that have great impact on their environment.

The old covenant was glorious when it came. The mountain shook. The voice of God bellowed forth. And Moses' face was so radiant, that in glory, that the people of God could not even look at it.

We read in verse 7 that the ministry of death written and engraved on stones was glorious. Texturally, that should be, it came in glory.

[8 : 56] When it arrived, it was spectacular. It came in great glory.

It is right that the old covenant came with such glory. Because in that covenant, the God of the universe, who is glorious above all else, reveals himself to man in a special way.

I love how Exodus 34 continues on to show how God is revealing himself.

In verse 4, it says, This is how God was, in the old covenant, revealing himself.

And when God reveals himself, there should be great glory around that, like a king arriving. But while this covenant is good and glorious, it is not good news.

[11 : 01] While it is easy for us to wish to have flashy faith and mighty works, the covenant that had those things was actually bad news for the people that heard it.

When we open that book with the eye-catching cover. We do not find a book that makes us glad, but the troubling reality that we are sinners, deserving condemnation.

The old covenant is a ministry of death. So that when the law of the old covenant comes in all of its glory, it condemns every last person.

Under the law, anyone who sins is guilty and deserves death. And there is not a soul alive who does not sin.

So when the law comes, it brings death. Deuteronomy 27, 26 summarizes this aspect of the law and says, Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.

[12 : 18] And all the people shall say amen. Beyond the fact that the law brought death and condemnation, look at what it brought to the people who heard it.

Moses came with a shining face, as we read earlier. And did the people rejoice at the coming of it? They fled in terror.

His face reflects the glory of God. And instead of the people of God getting to rejoice at the sight of it, Moses must cover his face and hide it from them.

Because filthy sinners are unfit to see God's holy glory or even a reflection of it.

The old covenant, even with all of its glory, is not so wonderful because the people who receive it aren't made righteous.

[13 : 36] They aren't cleansed of their filth. But instead they have a glaring spotlight pointed on all of their problems. The old covenant could not fix sinners' problems.

All it could do was show them. It's like an intervention without rehab. You know? Oh, realize you're lost in how much your life is being wrecked, and there's nothing to do about it.

It's not a good place to be. So that's point one. The old covenant and flashy glory. It is a glorious covenant, but it is not good news for sinners.

It is just a spotlight on our sin. So take away number one. Do not look for flashy glory.

If you let your heart and your actions be driven towards things that are outwardly impressive, you will miss out on the best promises and the greatest of hopes.

[14 : 48] Like fireworks and gunfire. They draw your attention. But one's going to lead to your death if you run towards it, and the other fades away in a moment.

If you seek things based on their spectacle, you will be led astray. So seek the truth instead of spectacles. Instead of outwardly impressive things.

Come to know the real value, the real weight that something carries. Or you will find yourself like the Israelites under a law that you can do nothing against.

Fighting self-righteously to somehow be good enough to reach the glory hidden behind the veil, but always unfit by your filth to draw near.

If you let flashy, outwardly impressive things guide you, you will die in your sins far from the true glory of God.

[15 : 57] Takeaway number two. Know that God's judgment is a glorious thing. It is a good, right, beautiful thing for God to condemn sinners.

It was fitting that the old covenant, even though it came with condemnation, was glorious. Because it is a glorious thing for justice to be done.

And God is good for doing it. Even if justice being done is bad news for us, it is a good thing.

Think of a murderer who has been condemned to prison and death. It is a good thing when that happens.

And it is good news for everyone else except for the murderer. So while God's judgment is scary, and it can be hard for us to look in the face of it, we must remember that God is very good when he punishes sin.

[17 : 08] That he is a just judge, and it is a good thing. He is glorified when he punishes sin, and he is glorified when he sends guilty people to suffer in hell for their crimes.

God is glorious when he condemns, and his judgment is glorious. Point number two. The new covenant and hidden glory.

If the old covenant is glorious like fireworks, against the night sky fireworks are grand and eye-catching, yet they fade just as the old covenant has.

If the old covenant is glorious like fireworks, then the new covenant is glorious like the sun. Like the sun, the rising fire that dawns on the world and changes how everything looks.

We do not do fireworks during the day because they do not compare to the glory of the sun. If you did fireworks during the day, you'd barely be able to see them in comparison to the shining radiance that is the sun in all of its glory.

[18 : 41] It's the same thing with the old covenant and the new. Even though that's true, if we are honest with ourselves, the new covenant doesn't look that glorious.

It doesn't look like the man coming down from the mountain with a face shining or a voice booming out of the cloud to us. It doesn't look like it's so glorious that no one would ever choose to look at the old covenant instead of the new.

Sometimes we may wish that our faith and the practice of it had some fireworks or some more miracles to shine out against the night that is out in the world.

Sometimes we might feel if we could get glory like they had back in those days, imagine the sorts of things that would happen. If we could have a cloud descend up here, maybe this building would be packed to the brim.

Sometimes we're tempted to think that way. But Paul's encouragement to us and to the Corinthians is that this glory that is hidden now outshines the glory of our world.

[20 : 09] And it is coming. Even though it's hidden, this glory will not be hidden forever. It is coming. It is coming. And it will dawn on us.

It is like when you're in the very early hours of the morning. It's been night, dark. And just over on the horizon, on one side, you can see the slight brightening.

You can't even glimpse the radiance of the glory of the sun yet. But just a little bit of its brightness lightens the sky on one side.

That is what it is like for us. We believers live in a time where it is darkness outside. Yet we have seen the first bits, the first glimmers of light dawning on the horizon.

And by faith, we know that what is coming is incredible. So even if we might feel drawn to the flashy things and wish there was more of that now, we are to live by faith, looking at those first glimmers of light on the horizon and looking forward to the day when that sun will rise in its glory.

[21 : 39] And there will be no question that our God reigns, that he is glorious over everything. And all of the things that have been done in the darkness will be brought to light.

And the glory will be plain to those who believe and those who have never believed. What's coming will be incredible.

And by faith, we see the first fruits of that. Let's take a look at how Paul talks about it. If you look at verse 8, we'll see him mention it, mention this coming glory there.

How will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? The ministry of the Spirit will be more glorious.

That's the answer to the question. It will be more glorious than that old covenant, even though it had all of that excitement, the cloud, the shining faces, the manna raining down from heaven, tablets written by God's own hand.

[22 : 47] Even though the fireworks seem bright now, one day they will be like nothing compared to the new covenant glory being revealed.

The things in this world that seem impressive and strong will not last forever. And all of their glory will be nothing compared to the glory of God on display.

Look at verse 10. For even what was made glorious, that's the old covenant, had no glory in this respect because of the glory that excels or exceeds it.

Paul is here saying that that all of the brilliance of the Old Testament is like nothing compared to the glory of the new covenant.

The glory we will have and we have tasted even a little bit of it now is so great that every glory we are tempted to look at in this world will seem like nothing by comparison.

[24 : 07] So we should be incredibly hopeful. We should be deeply positive, have the confidence that all of us feel that the sun's gonna rise tomorrow.

No one sits there at three in the morning waiting for the sunrise and says, I don't know, I don't know if it's gonna happen today. Maybe there won't be a dawn this day.

No, it's so surefire, especially when you see the first glimmers. That dawn is coming, that sun will rise. We should be incredibly hopeful because by faith we see those first glimmers and we know that what is following afterwards is so glorious that any sacrifice we have to make here, anything that we think we would want here is nothing in comparison.

This coming glory is unbelievable. But how can we, how can we have faith to have such confidence in the coming glory?

Because we read this and we know, okay, if the Bible says it, it is true. But if we're honest with ourselves, it can be hard when you're in the middle of that dark night to know that the morning is coming.

[25 : 44] It can be hard when we are, are decades in to this night, this present dark world to, to think that one day that glory will come and will make all things new.

So let's, let's look at, at a few of the ways the, the Bible would come to us in, in these doubts and try to build up our faith so that we might have great confidence in the glory that is coming.

So that we might be, be so sure. Here are, there are, here are three reasons that this passage gives us to be confident in how grand the glory is that is coming to us.

Reason number one, the new covenant is not written in letters on stone, but on our hearts by the spirit. Which would you rather have?

A rock with some words on it? Or the spirit of God in your heart guiding you, teaching you, and making you righteous. If, if the covenant that was accompanied by stones was glorious like fireworks, then the ministry of the spirit, the covenant that comes with the spirit must be infinitely greater.

[27 : 22] just as, as the spirit is infinitely greater than rocks. You can quote me on that, the Holy Spirit is better than rocks.

Let's, let's look at how Paul works through this in, in verse seven. He, he sets up the, the ministry written in stones. stones. But if the ministry of death written and engraved on stones was glorious, then he, he explains how it was glorious with Moses' shining face and all of that.

Afterwards, he asks this question, how will the ministry of the spirit not be more glorious? Here, Paul's emphasis is that the, the ministry of the spirit is greater than stone, the ministry that was written on stones because the spirit is greater.

So, take away number three. Every time you see the spirit working in your life, use that as a reminder that the covenant you are in and the glory you are waiting for is so much grander than anything that has come before.

the spirit's work in our lives at this time are the first glimmers of that dawn we wait for. When all the sky is dark save just one horizon that is beginning to brighten, remind yourself that this is a work of the spirit.

[29 : 12] When, when you are convicted of your sin, when you are given the strength to repent and obey, when you are sanctified, when, when your despairing heart is encouraged by the spirit, when the word of God comes to you in a timely manner, when God's plans work out to comfort you and strengthen you in the midst of difficulty, these are all works of the spirit that are meant to be your first tastes of the glory you look forward to.

So remind yourself of that, of the coming glory, every time you recognize God working in your life. So then we move on to reason two to be confident that this coming glory is greater than what's come before.

The old covenant condemns, but the new covenant makes us righteous. Look at verse nine, how Paul argues this so that the Corinthians can have confidence.

For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. Which is a greater work, to punish a criminal or to make him good?

Is it easier to condemn crime or to reform a criminal? In the same way, the ministry that condemns sinners is less great, is a less great work than the ministry that makes sinners righteous.

[31 : 04] The old covenant cannot compare with the glory and the power that is revealed in a covenant that takes wretched sinners and makes them righteous like Jesus.

God has worked in you. He has made you righteous. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2.

You'll find it on page 1796, just a little bit further along in the Bible. Here we will see a great explanation of how the new covenant is a ministry of righteousness.

Follow along with me in verse 1. And you he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the counsel of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling our desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

And then you see the work of the new covenant. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved, and raised us up together, and made us sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

[33 : 05] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.

And you see the righteousness working out even further in verse 10. For we are his workmanship created in Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This is not the lesser power to punish sinners. This is the greater power that makes sinners righteous, that prepares them for good works.

You can turn back to 2 Corinthians. He has taken rebel sinners, and he has prepared them to go out and to do good works.

The covenant that does that sort of thing must be way glorious, must be way grand, must shine like the sun, and far more than that covenant that's simply condemned.

[34 : 19] Reason number three to be confident in the glory that is coming. The old covenant passed away, and the new covenant will remain forever.

look at how Paul closes this paragraph in verse 11. For if what was passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

The old covenant was passing away. God has done away with it. And if God does away with something, it is because what he is bringing next is far better.

He is a wonderful, loving God. So when he takes something away, it is to put something better in its place.

So we know that if the old covenant passed away, the new covenant must be better. Consider how this works out.

[35 : 29] If you love someone, would you ever take something good away from them? Well, the answer is you should if doing that would bring them something even better.

Like a parent who punishes a child, they take away good things from them that they might learn the obedience that will make their life even better.

better. And so if God takes away the old covenant, it is so that he can bring a covenant that will be even more glorious.

So the simple fact that the old covenant is being taken away shows us that the new covenant must be even better. Hebrews 8, 13 says this, makes this very clear when it says, in speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.

In what is becoming obsolete, is growing old and is ready to vanish away. The new covenant must be better than the old because God is loving.

[36 : 45] And this covenant, this new covenant, isn't just here for a limited time to then be done away with for an even better covenant. No, this new covenant will be here forever.

Over and over, the scripture calls it an everlasting covenant. I love how Isaiah 55 puts it, it says, and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

God says there, just as much as I love David faithfully all the way through his whole life, I will love you. And if God makes an everlasting covenant, it must be the best, the most glorious covenant possible.

If he is putting something in place that is going to last forever, it is because there is nothing better that could possibly exist. Christ. And so we, members of the new covenant, people who have tasted the first bits of it, have seen the first lights, are waiting for what will be the most amazing relationship that God has ever had with man in the history of the world.

Far better than even Adam and Eve in the garden is the new covenant with Christ as the Savior. Thank God for an everlasting covenant. So we should see that we have a sure hope of great glory.

[38 : 33] We should turn these truths over and over in our minds so that our hearts sing with joy at the hope of the coming day when it will no longer be just twinkling light off in the distance, but the fullness of the sun dawning in our lives.

We should remind ourselves of these things so that our hearts sing with hope about it, rejoicing at the coming day. If you have trusted in Christ, if you have truly repented and believed in him, you have already seen the first parts of this glory dawn in your heart.

Even though it is hidden, know that it is worth far more than the flashy glories of these days. The first fruits of the harvest are yours, and you should eagerly await the dawning of the sun.

God will but if you're here today, and you have not trusted in Christ, perhaps you have thought to yourself, perhaps you thought that you have trusted in Christ, but now you're realizing that deep down you never actually repented and came to believe in him, and it was just something you did on the outside.

I urge you please take hold of Christ. If you have never trusted in him, you are dead in your sins and trespasses.

[40 : 16] You are a criminal and under the law of condemnation, but there is a way out, a pardon exists, a ministry that makes criminals righteous, and you sitting here are right in the middle of that ministry, so take hold of him and his gospel.

All of us must not look to flashy things, nor be drawn away by what seems impressive, but we should look to the truth and judge life rightly by the truth, so that we might hold fast to this new covenant, covenant to this gospel.

We should turn aside from flashy things and instead to a hidden hope of a great glory that outshines all others.

love how Paul summarizes the folly of worldly things and the beauty that will come. He summarizes it in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and we'll close with that.

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away, but we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

[41 : 59] None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not crucify the Lord of glory. But as it is written, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.

These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. Now we, skipping down to verse 12, now we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given to us by God.

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Let's close in prayer. Lord, help us to persevere looking forward to the hope of your glory that will outshine the sun.

Let us persevere as we long in the dark of the night for the day when you will be a light in our midst, the sun shining down on us.