

Transfiguration Sunday
March 2, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Glory is Hidden in Order to Be Revealed

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 (EHV)

If the ministry that brought death (which was engraved in letters on stone) came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look directly at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face (though it was fading), ⁸how will the ministry of the spirit not be much more glorious? ⁹For if the ministry that brought condemnation has glory, the ministry that brought righteousness has even more glory. ¹⁰In fact, in this case, what was glorious is no longer very glorious, because of the greater glory of that which surpasses it. ¹¹Indeed, if what is fading away was glorious, how much more glorious is that which is permanent!

¹²Therefore, since we have this kind of hope, we act with great boldness. ¹³We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face, so that the Israelites could not continue to look at the end of the radiance, as it was fading away. ¹⁴In spite of this, their minds were hardened. Yes, up to the present day, the same veil remains when the Old Testament is read. It has not been removed because it is taken away only in Christ. ¹⁵Instead, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸But all of us who reflect the Lord's glory with an unveiled face are being transformed into his own image, from one degree of glory to another. This too is from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The season of Epiphany is a time to see Jesus' glory as the one and only Son of God. We've seen one "aha" moment after another throughout this season beginning with his baptism, continuing with miracles and amazing teachings, and ending today with Christ's glorious Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John were able to see the glory of God shining from Jesus on this day. While Jesus hid his glory as the eternal Son of God under his humanity most of the time, on this occasion, his glory was revealed in full. Peter wanted to stay in the glory of Jesus longer. But Jesus had to come down from the mount of glory to go to Jerusalem and die for the sin of the world. His glory would again be hidden, this time by suffering, death and burial, only to be revealed again in his resurrection on the third day.

Jesus is eternally glorious. There was never a time when he was more or less glorious, just times when humans like us could perceive his glory more or less clearly. Christ revealed his glory at certain times according to his plan to save the world from sin and death. Christ hid his glory at certain times for the same purpose of saving sinners. And he has accomplished our salvation. This is the glorious gospel of the new covenant in which Paul rejoices in 2 Corinthians, chapter 3. Paul wants us to see that what Christ has done for us is more glorious than the old covenant. He wants us to reflect the glory of Christ to others in our lives.

If the ministry that brought death (which was engraved in letters on stone) came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look directly at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face (though it was fading), ⁸how will the ministry of the spirit not be much more glorious? ⁹For if the ministry that brought condemnation has glory, the ministry that brought righteousness has even more glory. ¹⁰In fact, in this case, what was glorious is no longer very glorious, because of the greater glory of that which surpasses it. ¹¹Indeed, if what is fading away was glorious, how much more glorious is that which is permanent!

All of the Scriptures can be divided into two basic teachings, the law and the gospel. Paul compares the law with the gospel in these verses. First of all, we are told that both the law and the gospel are glorious. Paul wants us to think back to the giving of the Ten Commandments and the law on Moses at Mount Sinai. It was a glorious sight! There was thunder and lightning,

smoke and fire, a mountain that trembled and the blast of a ram's horn. God displayed his glory as he gave his holy law to Moses for God's people. God's law is good and perfect and holy. There is nothing wrong with God's law. It is glorious that Moses' face would be shining after he would talk with God and receive the law from God.

So, let us not misunderstand and think that the law is bad and the gospel is good. Both are good. Both are perfect. Both are wonderful gifts of God. Both are glorious. However, when Paul compares the law with the gospel, he says, "what was glorious is no longer very glorious, because of the greater glory of that which surpasses it." Both are glorious but the gospel is so great that it overshadows the glory of the law.

The problem is not with the law. Rather it is with those to whom the law is given. The problem is with us. Paul tells us what happens when the glorious law of God is brought to sinful people like us. He calls it the "*the ministry that brought death*" and the "*ministry that brought condemnation.*" The good and glorious law of God condemns to eternal death all who do not keep the law. The law is good, but we are not. The law is perfect, but we are not. The law is holy, but we are not.

But what if I could be better? What if I tried harder to keep the law of God? What if I ordered my whole life around the law of God? Wouldn't that please God? Wouldn't that lead to a good life now and maybe forever? Many of Jews misread the law of God in this way. Paul himself had been a member of the Pharisees, who took God's laws very seriously. Many sincerely wanted to do exactly what God said to do and by so doing, earn the favor of God. Paul tells us that relying on the law, and more specifically, on our ability to keep the law, brings death and condemnation, not glory.

Paul directs us to the gospel, which he describes as "*the ministry of the spirit*" and "*the ministry that brought righteousness.*" When a sinner is told that Christ suffered and died to pay for their sins, spiritual life is given. Instead of death that results from the proclamation of the law, life is given by the proclamation of the gospel. Jesus secured this life by giving up his life. He came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and hid his glory in order to die on the cross so that we sinners can receive spiritual and eternal life through faith in Christ. The hiding of his glory for a time results in eternal glory for we who had been under the law that brought death. Now we have life!

And we have righteousness. The law condemns us for what we have failed to do, what we have done wrong, and for everything we've thought and said contrary to the perfect law of God. The gospel proclaims the truth that Christ has thought, spoken and done everything perfectly according to the holy law of God. What is more, the gospel tells us sinners that Christ's perfect righteousness is credited to all who believe in him. By faith, we are credited with righteousness before God. By faith, we will stand before God on judgment day, and he will say, "well done, good and faithful servant," for all that Christ did has been credited to us. Truly the gospel's glory surpasses that of the law.

And wait, there is more. The glory of the gospel is permanent. When Moses talked with the Lord, the glory that shone from his face faded away with time. If we were to rely on the law of God to make us right with God, we would never be sure if we had done enough. Even if we had a good day, would that good day continue to count for the future when we have not so good days at keeping God's law? If we are going to rely on keeping the law, we would have to have a great day every day, to have any confidence. Of course, we never have such a day in the light of God's holy law.

But the gospel proclaims what Christ has done for us. The Son of God was born without original sin, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus continued to live without sin, actively loving his Father in heaven and his neighbors on earth. Our actions do not affect Christ's perfect life. We cannot ruin what Christ accomplished. The glory of Christ's

perfect life is permanent. As is the glory of his suffering and death. Christ willingly came down from the mountain where he had shown his full glory. He willingly went to Jerusalem where he knew that his friend would betray him, his enemies would arrest him, soldiers would mock him, flog him, and nail him to a cross. He knew that his friends would abandon him and that his Father would forsake him. He knew that his lifeless body would be taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb. The almighty, glorious Son of God knew all that would happen to him and willingly he suffered for us. You can't change what Christ did for you and we wouldn't want to. His sacrifice is the once and for all, permanent sacrifice. No other sacrifice is needed. Nothing more is demanded from us. Nothing we can do will add to or take away from what Christ has done for us and for our salvation. How glorious is the permanent, life-giving, righteousness crediting gospel!

The people of Israel could tell that Moses had been in God's presence by looking at the face of Moses. If it was shining with the glory of God, he had been close to the Lord recently. Moses began to hide his face with a veil so the people would not see that the glory on his face as it faded away. Paul tells us that we who have brought to spiritual life through the gospel of Christ have unveiled faces. We have no need to hide our connection with Christ from the world. We have the freedom and boldness to declare that we are forgiven and righteous because of Christ and Christ alone. In this way, our faces are similar to that of Moses. Paul writes:

All of us who reflect the Lord's glory with an unveiled face are being transformed into his own image, from one degree of glory to another.

The glory of the gospel reflects in our faces. It happens here when we look at the cross and receive the forgiveness of sins through the means of grace. Then we turn our faces to each other and reflect the love and forgiveness of Christ to them. It happens when life happens to us, and we turn to God's Word for comfort instead of the remedies of the world. It happens when our sinful nature led us into public sin and we turn back to the Lord in repentance, showing those around us that we do not depend on ourselves, but upon Christ alone. Throughout our lives as Christians, the Lord is shaping us and making our faces more like his glorious face so that we reflect his love, compassion, kindness and forgiveness more and more.

Now that the season of Epiphany is coming to an end, we turn our faces to the passion of our Savior. We will watch closely as he makes his way willingly and purposefully to the cross. We will watch as Christ wins our salvation. The world would not describe much of what Christ will suffer as glorious. But through the gospel the glory hidden in all that Christ does is revealed to be a glory that surpasses all others. Glory be to Jesus!

Amen.