

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY – THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Glory that Endures

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 (CSB)

⁷ Now if the ministry that brought death, chiseled in letters on stones, came with glory, so that the Israelites were not able to gaze steadily at Moses's face because of its glory, which was set aside, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? ⁹ For if the ministry that brought condemnation had glory, the ministry that brings righteousness overflows with even more glory. ¹⁰ In fact, what had been glorious is not glorious now by comparison because of the glory that surpasses it. ¹¹ For if what was set aside was glorious, what endures will be even more glorious. ¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from gazing steadily until the end of the glory of what was being set aside, ¹⁴ but their minds were hardened. For to this day, at the reading of the old covenant, the same veil remains; it is not lifted, because it is set aside only in Christ. ¹⁵ Yet still today, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, ¹⁶ but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.

On a mountain where lighting flashed, thunder roared, and a thick cloud of smoke covered the top, where a very loud trumpet blast got louder and louder and the whole mountain trembled violently along with the people gathered at the base, this is where Moses received the law of God, words chiseled in letters on stone. When Moses came down and spoke these words to the Israelites, his face shone as a result of his speaking with the LORD. Whenever Moses finished speaking God's Word to them, he put a veil over his face, covering that radiant glory that came from God's commands as it fading away the longer he was away from the LORD.

Although we don't get to see Moses' face radiating with God's glory after he talked with the LORD, we can still see how God's law, his commands, are glorious. Last week, we talked about being peacemakers by overcoming evil with good, by blessing those who curse you, caring for your enemies, living in harmony with one another, making every effort to live at peace with everyone, by not being proud or conceited, by associating with people in low position, being careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. When we love the people who hate us, when we are kind to those who try to tear us down, when we are unceasingly patient with stubborn people, when we constantly put others and their needs ahead of our own and serve them, it looks glorious! This is the glory of God's law, which even the world recognizes.

And what do you do when someone compliments you for how well you keep God's laws? Do you think to yourself, "You know what, I am pretty great"? Do you feel validated, but know that you need to look humble, and so you respond with a false humility while in your heart you are proud of the great work you have done? Do you fight the assessment, contradict the person starting to recount all the ways that you are not glorious, not good? Does it create opposite thoughts where you are focused on all your failures?

You often don't feel as good as you look, do you? You don't feel as good as you look because you know who and what you truly are. For the moments when we are doing and keeping God's laws, we look glorious, but that glory quickly fades as we look into his law and see all that we don't do perfectly. It acts as a mirror for us and shows us all the ways that we have failed God. It shows every single wrinkle and blemish and zit. It shows us where we indulge and where we lack. Even on our best days when we have seemingly done all that we can do, we have still fallen short. You look at yourself, you look at all your vile, hateful, selfish, lustful thoughts and you hate yourself for them. If someone had a slideshow of what goes through your mind, they would never look at you the same. We are condemned for every single way that we are imperfect.

God's law that came down from Mount Sinai is a ministry that brings condemnation as we look into it as a mirror and see how disgustingly imperfect we are. This is a ministry that brings death as everyone who sins also dies. Our glory of keeping God's commands quickly fades with every single one of our imperfections, just like the glory on Moses' face fading after he received God's commands on Mount Sinai. We try to veil ourselves, hide ourselves, as our glory fades and our sin is revealed.

But on a different mountain some 1450+ years later, Jesus, Peter, James, and John were praying. While they were praying, Jesus changed in appearance. His clothes became dazzling white, his face radiated the glory of the Lord. Two more men – Moses and Elijah – joined the four. Moses, Elijah, and Jesus talked about his mission, which he was soon to complete in Jerusalem and then depart. After Peter expressed the desire for them all to stay up here on this mountain, a cloud appeared and a voice boomed: "This is my Son, the Chosen One, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35 & Matthew 17:5)

On this mountain, there was a glory what was veiled with human flesh. On the outside, Jesus looked like any ordinary, regular person. But he was and is both God and man at the same time. For that brief moment on this other mountain, we get a peek at Jesus' glory. As he shown dazzling white and with God the Father's approval spoken over him, we get to see that Jesus' glory did not and does not fade like Moses' face. Instead, his glory, his perfection, was and is always there.

Jesus had perfectly kept all of God's laws at all times through his conception to this very point in time on this mountain. He had a glory that we could never create or keep. On this mountain stood not merely an example of what we should be, but one who is our substitute, who took our place for us. The Chosen One's mission was to live perfectly for us, a ministry to bring us righteousness. He completed it, and so the glory of this new covenant where God forgives our sins and covers us with Jesus' complete perfection surpasses the glory of the old covenant, the law that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. And because Jesus is God, this is a glory that never fades, that shines unending, always just as bright, from age to age.

When we look into the mirror of God's glorious law on that first mountain, we find only a fading glory for ourselves because we don't continually keep God's laws. On this second mountain, we find a glory for us that does not fade because Christ's perfect life lived for us never perishes, spoils, or fades. When we see that Jesus completed God's old covenant laws perfectly for us in our place, then the veil is lifted from us and set aside. Before, all we saw were the gross blemishes of our sin. Now the truth is that we are actually better than we look because we are clothed with an unfading glory. The Holy Spirit has clothed us with Christ's righteousness, his perfection. Because the Holy Spirit has focused you on Jesus and his life lived for you, "We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit." (verse 18) That's how good you look: transformed into the perfect, glorious image of God.

Whenever we look back into the mirror of God's law, like the law given on Mount Sinai, we quickly see again all our blemishes and how horribly short we fall from God's glorious standards. So we need to keep looking to the second mountain, to Jesus. There our perfection is already done for us. He accomplished it. He is the Chosen One, the one approved by God. We are transformed into that same image every time we recognize and confess our sins and are told that they have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west. We are renewed in that image when we remember that God the Holy Spirit gifted us Jesus' perfect glory through his Word combined with water in our baptisms. We are transformed in that image again and again as we partake in Jesus' body and blood given for us in his Supper. God the Holy Spirit points you to this second mountain to show you how really good you are as you are covered with all that Jesus did.

The law of God is glorious, but that glory fades as we see all our imperfections and shortcomings as reflected by how we did not keep all God's laws. In Christ, we are covered with his glorious perfection because he accomplished his mission to live perfectly for us in our place. The glory of the Mount of Transfiguration surpasses the glory of Mount Sinai because it replaces the command of "do" to "done in Christ." We are transformed into his image as the Holy Spirit turns our hearts to Christ, an image of unfading glory. This hope, this look, of enduring glory we boldly share. Amen.