

Going from Glory to Glory

Let's turn together to 2 Cor. 3 and while we're turning there, let's consider this question: *how do we change?* Specifically, how can we experience positive, spiritual change in our lives? When we feel distant from God, how do we get closer to Him? When we're falling to the same sins time and again, how do we experience freedom from sins bondage? When we live under the weight of condemnation and shame, how do we come into the sunshine of God's love and acceptance?

All of these things involve change – but so often we can feel stuck in the same place day after day, year after year. *How do we change?*

These verses speak powerfully to that question. Let's pray and then read vv. 7-11 and I am reading from the New King James Version.

***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, **8** how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? **9** For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. **10** For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. **11** For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. 2 Cor. 3:7-11 NKJV*

If you remember from last week, some at Corinth were demanding Paul to produce letters of recommendation to vouch for the authenticity of his apostolic ministry, and to answer them Paul simply points out that the church in Corinth wouldn't exist if not for his apostolic ministry. *They* are his letter of recommendation, not paper written on with ink, but hearts written on by the Holy Spirit.

We want to follow Paul's logic here: the difference between letters of recommendation being written on paper with ink and letters of recommendation being written on hearts by the Holy Spirit very logically brings us to the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Our Bibles are divided into two major sections: what we call the Old Testament (or Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant). And the core difference has to do with what is written on what.

The Old Covenant was built on the law of God written on tablets of stone. The New Covenant is built on the Spirit of God writing on soft human hearts.

***31** "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. **32** It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, " declares the LORD. **33** "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Jer. 31:31-33*

God wrote the law on stones of tablet with His finger. When Moses brought these tablets down from the

mountain his face radiated the glory of God, and that glory made people afraid to come near him, so they put a veil over Moses' face.

The law was and is good. God's own finger wrote it. But the power of sin working inside of us made us incapable of keeping the law and those stone tablets couldn't help us. So all the law could do was show us our failure. Those hard tablets became unbending reminders that we fall short. The law condemns and ministers death not because its bad but because we're bad. We're afraid to look at the glory of God because it reminds us of how unglorious we are. Like Adam, we hide from God, ashamed.

The law was glorious...but it ministered death! Moses' face was glorious...but it condemned us! God didn't give the law to save us, but to show us it could never save us. The glory of the law was passing away from the moment He gave it, because God had a greater glory to give us.

The Old Covenant had glory. Jesus brought a greater glory.

One night I was just about to head up to bed when Matt came home saying I had to see the moon – it was huge and brilliant red! So we ran outside, me in my pajamas, but we couldn't see it with the trees and homes around us. So we got in the car, me still my pjs and no glasses, to try and catch a glimpse of the moon. As we drove on the highway looking all over for the moon, we saw a car sitting on the side of the road with its flashers and as we're wondering why they've pulled over, suddenly we hit something, bang! I'm there in my pjs and no glasses, and neither of us knew what we just hit. We doubled back, and it was a deer that the car on the side hit and we finished the job.

But we were trying to see the glory of a brilliant red moon. If you've ever had the opportunity to see the night sky in a remote place where there's no light pollution, it's really amazing how glorious it is! The vast number of stars and galaxies are mind blowing. Stars and galaxies and the moon all have glory.

But when the sun rises, it's glory not only exceeds the glory of the moon and stars, it eclipses their glory. You can't see them anymore, or barely see them. Because the glory of the sun is a greater glory.

Jesus brought a greater glory.

And that glory makes all the difference to our lives, and answers the question, *how do we change?* Let's pick up in verse 12.

¹² Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— ¹³ unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸ 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, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Cor. 3:12-18 NKJV

Moses put a veil over his face to shield the Israelites from seeing the glory that was passing away. That veil is taken away when we turn to Christ. When we turn in faith to Christ, the veil is taken away and we see the glory of God...and we're not condemned, we're not ashamed, we're not killed.

Because Jesus was condemned in our place as a lawbreaker so that by faith we are made righteous in God's sight. A righteousness that comes by faith, not the law. Christ's righteousness covering us as if it were our righteousness. God fully accepts us – no condemnation, no guilt, no shame, no death. Jesus took all that in our place. God's glory covers us with hope, and we can be very bold in His presence. Because when God looks at us, He sees His Son.

Jesus brought a greater glory! Don't you love His glory?

Coming back to our question: *How do we change?* We want to have victory over sin, we want to live closer to God, we want to know the love of God more deeply. But how? *How do we change?*

A big part of the answer is: *what are we looking at?*

Legalism says, *look at the law*. Today it might not be the stone tablets Moses brought down, but it's still a set of rules that say, *do this, don't do that*.

And we hope that if we do good enough keeping those rules, we'll change. We'll be closer to God. We'll defeat that sin. But the result is either condemnation where we always feel we're falling short, or pride, where we think we're doing good enough but think everyone else is falling short. Legalism has no power to change us.

Licentiousness says, *look at yourself*. Do what you want, live how you want, believe what you want. It's all about you and it's all good Self-expression, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self, self, self. Look at *me*. I'm always able to clear every bar because I lower the bar to where I can clear it. I change the definition of sin to what I think is sin. No guilt. No shame. No problem. But there is a problem.

We become the ultimate authority in our lives. When what God's word and what we want clash, what we want wins. When there's conflict between what God's word says is true and what we believe is true, what we believe wins. We change God's word instead of God's word changing us.

Legalism says *look at the law*. Licentiousness says, *look at yourself*. Neither can save us, both minister death, shame, guilt, condemnation, judgment.

The Spirit of God says, *look at Christ*.

18 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, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

When we turn to Jesus, the veil is taken away. We are able to see God's glory in the face of Christ and that glory looks like love, mercy, acceptance, faithfulness, and we don't have to hide. Jesus saves us from

our sin, and gives us the Holy Spirit who writes the law on our hearts so we want to love and obey God!

We still struggle with sin, and when we sin we confess it to God for forgiveness, but we long to please our heavenly Father because His law is written on our hearts.

Let's close with a couple interesting observations about what verse 18 says about how we change. **But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord...**

There's some debate over what the word translated *behold* means. The Greek word can mean to gaze at, and it can mean to reflect. So is this saying we are to gaze at the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, or do we reflect the glory of the Lord as in a mirror?

I agree with David Powlinson who says it means both. We reflect what we gaze at. We will begin to look like what we look at.

How do we change? Look at Jesus! Gaze upon him, contemplate him, learn from him, spend time with him in heart to heart prayer. The Bible is our clearest mirror to see Jesus. Open the Bible with an open and humble heart, with a posture that says, "Lord, I don't want to twist your Truth to conform to my life, I ask you to shape my life to conform to your Truth." See Jesus in God's word and let him change you. We change as we look at Jesus!

The second truth here is that this change is incremental: *from glory to glory*.

But we all... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We don't go from level 1 glory to level 15 glory in one leap. It's an upward trajectory but it's incremental. That's why sincere, loving Christians can still have a fair amount of mess in our lives. It's not because the Spirit isn't working, it's because we are being transformed from glory **to** glory.

I recently have been going to the Y and swimming laps. I'm not a strong swimmer and so I find after one lap, I'm gulping for air, and my heart is racing and I need to rest on the side for a few seconds. Sometimes as I try to get better breathing technique I come up spluttering. I half expect the lifeguard to say, "that's not swimming. That's drowning with style!" And then I see people swimming lap after lap after lap for 30 minutes without stopping, and to be honest I get discouraged. And I feel self-conscious.

So over the past few weeks I haven't been going in. One reason is I am focused on my lack of progress and I'm self-conscious about the incremental nature of getting better. Because I'm not where I want to be, I'm struggling with the desire to give up.

Isn't that what happens when we start focusing our attention on our progress rather than on Jesus? We get impatient. Discouraged. We want to give up.

So as we look at Jesus, let's be patient with ourselves. And with each other. Yeah, there's mess. But there's

grace! And as we behold Jesus' glory, the Spirit is working in us, transforming us from glory to glory. Let's not focus on our mess, let's focus on God's grace.

- When we sin, let's confess it to God and receive His forgiveness.
- When we fail, let's learn the lessons God has for us and keep going.
- When we succeed, let's not get proud, let's give God the glory and keep going.

What are you looking at? It's been a crazy year! Coronavirus, election, economy – it's easy to get consumed with these things. Maybe you're looking at your own failures, or trials, or desires.

We see these things, of course. We can't block everything in life from our view. But let's resolve to focus on Jesus knowing as we do, the Spirit will be working and writing on our hearts.

Let the words of Hebrews 12 be our benediction this morning:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Heb 12:1-3