

God's Unveiled Glory

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Intro:

Good morning. It's a joy to preach to you this morning.

3400 years ago, somewhere in the middle east, a man named Moses was Chosen by God to lead God's people Israel. He was a messiah figure who would save God's people from the land of bondage and slavery (through signs and wonders and miracles) and transfer them to a land of "milk and honey" – a land of freedom and prosperity and safety. On the journey to the promised land, Moses spoke with God on a mountain, and God gave Moses the 10 commandments, written on stone tablets, with the very finger of God. Those tablets would represent God's law to his people. But before Moses could even show them this law, they were already breaking it. Like rebellious children, they disobeyed and betrayed their Father God. They worshipped a golden image in the shape of a young cow (a calf), and said about their hand-made idols "*These* are your gods... who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (Ex. 32:4).

And so when Moses descended Mount Sinai, Moses, in anger, smashed those tablets God wrote on – which symbolized Israel breaking God's law even in the process of God giving it to them. The people of God were so rebellious that they didn't even have God's law for 5 minutes and they were already breaking it (sound familiar? This is our story too!). Because of this, God was wrathful and angry against their sin. God is a HOLY God, which means that he is perfect and pure and morally spotless – and that he cannot live with sin. He cannot live with morally dirty people. The bible says that the wages of sin is death, and that all sin is ultimately against God. And so God planned to wipe Israel out, to kill every last one of them for their sin against Him. And God told Moses that he would make a great nation out of him alone! But for all of these people, they would die.

In light of this, Moses talked to God again and he pleaded with God for mercy on the people, and God spared them. More than that, God re-wrote the 10 commandments on 2 new tablets of stone to replace the Old Tablets Moses broke. When Moses came back down from the mountain, his face was shining from talking with God. His face reflected the glory of God that he saw when he met with God. Apparently the shining of his face was so frightening to sinful people, that his own brother Aaron was too afraid to talk to him. The fear that Israel had of YHWH in his glory – just a couple chapters earlier – is now the same fear they have of Moses.

Only after Moses called – and probably “comforted” – the people, did they come near to Moses. And when they came near, Moses SPOKE the words of God to them, with the glory of God radiating from his face. And after Moses finished speaking, he put a veil over his face and we’re not told why.

Exodus 34 summarizes this story and says,

“Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.”

That is where we pick up in our text this morning. Moses is talking with God and bringing God’s words to God’s people. The people are seeing the glory on his face, and then Moses veils the glory with a covering. The Apostle Paul – who is writing about 1400 years after Moses – uses this story of Moses as a parable for our Christian lives. In fact, he uses Moses’ story to show us why Paul can be bold in his ministry. What Moses did gives *us* reason to be bold in ministry; in our evangelism and in our discipleship. We should be bold, because we have a greater ministry than MOSES! We have the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which does not veil glory, but instead UNVEILS glory.

If you have your Bibles, please turn to 2 Cor 3:12-18; 2 Corinthians 3 and verses 12-18. This is God's Word:

Scripture:

¹²Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. ¹⁹For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

This is the Word of the Lord.

In this text Paul gives us 3 reasons to be confident in our ministry. First 1) because of our sure hope, 2) because we're not under condemnation, and 3) because our hearts have been unveiled.

I believe that this message is particularly relevant for us this morning as Canadians. Even though I have been living in Kentucky for about 4 years now, I still struggle with valuing politeness over boldness, because I am a Canadian! But God calls us to something greater; he calls us to be bold for his sake, even at risk of others not liking us. So as we look at these reasons Paul gives us to be bold, let's let these reasons wash over us, and challenge the social pressures we face as Canadians.

Let's look at these 3 reasons in our text together.

First, we must be bold to proclaim the Gospel,

1) BECAUSE We have a Sure Hope

Verses 11-12 says that. It says,

*“For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more **will what is permanent have glory.** ¹²**Since we have such a hope,** we are very bold...”*

Here the Apostle Paul states that we have hope in the New Covenant. Unlike the Old Covenant, which was temporary, the New Covenant lasts FOREVER. And more than that, the New Covenant has even MORE GLORY than the Old! We don't just have temporary access to God's glory on the face of Moses anymore; we have permanent access to God's glory on the face of Jesus Christ. The New Covenant gives us total access to God, which Paul will explain in the following verses. And because of these things, we have hope. We have a future expectation that is certain and sure and fixed in heaven.

A year and a half ago, I bought Bethany an engagement ring, and I planned to asked her to be my wife. I HOPED that she would say “yes”, but I didn't know for sure. And so as I got everything together and my friends loaded into the truck to prepare the perfect spot for us on the top of a hill, which overlooked multiple counties (it was beautiful), I remember being super nervous because she could still say no! What if my hopes were about to be let down? What if what I was looking forward to would never even come to pass? What if I got down on one knee and asked, “will you marry me?” and she said, “no!” That was still possible.

Friends, the Hope that we have in God's covenant is not like the hope that I had that Bethany would say yes. The hope that I had that Bethany would say yes was not based on a covenant with her that we had entered into. There was no foundation for my hope except for if Bethany

wanted to – if she felt like she wanted to accept my proposal that day. But now that we're married, I don't have to worry if Bethany is going to be around. I have a SURE HOPE that she's not just gunna walk out whenever she feels like it because of the covenant that we have entered into together.

Friends, MARRIAGE is the type of HOPE we have in the promises of God. Access to God's glory in his PERMANENT COVENANT with us as believers. We have access to the fountain of life – to the creator of the cosmos, to the Lord of all Glory, to a relationship with God.

This is such a big deal because we NEED this hope. You and I are all sinners – the bible says. It doesn't matter if you're tall or short, or athletic or a couch potato, or young or old – the Bible says we have all sinned against God and we all deserve to die for that sin. And why? Well, because of our sins, we do not have access to God. We have a veil over our hearts that separates us from God and therefore are cut off from God! We are cut off from the one who is LIFE ITSELF – who is the fountain of life – and when we are all cut off from him we are destined to die forever in the torments of hell.

And so we are all HOPELESS ASIDE from this divine work of unveiling. But thanks be to God, that when we repent of our sins and believe on Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, and removes the veils over our hearts, we are given access to God for the first time, we are given life.

And this life is not given to us on the basis of our good works – as if we could ever keep God's law! No! All of us are sinners and deserve death! Instead Jesus kept the law for us, so that we could receive the access to God by the Holy Spirit and through faith. In other words, Jesus did what we could never do for ourselves; He keeps God's law perfectly, down to the smallest submission of the heart, and then he gives us the blessing of access to God – which he earned – through faith in him. Because Jesus earned access to God FOR US by his perfect works, we now receive those benefits by the Holy Spirit and through faith.

And so we can be bold because this is OUR MINISTRY! We can be bold because the kind of ministry we have is a ministry of HOPE AND SALVATION. It's a message of SURE forgiveness and mercy and grace and SURE resurrection from the dead. It is a message of access to God through faith in Jesus Christ! This is what we have to offer others: the SURE HOPE OF SALVATION for those who trust in Jesus Christ.

So, the first reason we can be bold in sharing our faith is because we have a SURE HOPE. The second reason is:

2) BECAUSE We're Not under Condemnation

Look at verse 13,

"...not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.

In Exodus 34, Moses would go in to speak with God. He would then come out from speaking with Him, and then he would have a shining face that reflected the glory of God. The people would see this, and then they would hear from Moses what God had said. After Moses finished speaking, he placed a veil over his face to cover up the glory.

This glory was God's glory and so when Moses covered it up, it was a negative thing. Moses was enacting a story of Israel's relationship with God. By veiling the glory of God on his face, he was – in fact – separating the people of God from the presence of God. That's exactly how the veil in the Temple and the Tabernacle worked. The veil separated what was UNHOLY from what was HOLY. Moses was – like the prophets who would come after him – dramatizing the current condition of Israel's relationship with God. Moses was showing that they were SEPARATED from

God. Moses was PHYSICALLY SHOWING that they had HARD HEARTS, which were SPIRITUALLY VEILED, not able to see God.

This is just like the prophets of the Old Testament who would enact their prophecies like a drama. Ezekiel would lay on his side for hundreds of days to depict the punishment of Israel's sins. Jeremiah would walk across the country in dirty shorts and later take rotting shorts to show how Israel would be good for nothing. And Moses shields the glory of God, because God has condemned his unbelieving people. And this is exactly what God does with a sinful people; he withdraws his presence from them and he judges them and gives them over to live in their hardness of heart.

This is the danger not only for unbelievers, but for believers! This is the danger of unconfessed sin, friends. And this is why it is so important that we live a life of repentance. As believers, there is a necessary distance that develops in our relationship with the Lord, when we continue in unconfessed sin. A rift develops in your relationship with God and you feel spiritually starved. But when we confess our sin, seek accountability, and expose our sin to the light, our souls are healed and our relationship with God is restored. Even though it's hard, it's worth it, because we will see more of God, and receive more of his grace. It's going to cost something, but the treasure you'll gain in intimacy with God far surpasses whatever he's calling you to give up.

Now let's jump back into our text.

Verse 13 says that Moses was covering up "THE OUTCOME of what was being brought TO AN END." Okay, let's just pause there for a second. What does that mean? What is being brought to an end here? Well, it is the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant is temporary and the New Covenant is permanent. Here Paul contrasts the two Covenants. And so the Old Covenant is being brought to an end.

But what is the outcome of this thing being brought to an end? What is the OUTCOME of the Old Covenant? The word “outcome” can also mean “result”. So, what is the results of the Glory of God on a sinful people, in the Old Covenant? Judgement. Wrath. Condemnation. That’s what happens when God’s glory is unveiled to a sinful people. Judgment. God judges sin. And so the Apostle Paul is telling us here that if Israel continued to see the glory of God on Moses’ face, they would experience the results of the glory of God on a sinful people. They would experience death and condemnation.

And so Moses covered it up. Moses covered it up to protect the people from the outcome of the Old Covenant – which was judgement and death.

In one sense, the veil was a mercy, so God would delay the judgement coming on Israel. But in a greater sense, this was just judgement through and through; Israel was a stench to God’s nostrils, and if they got too close, God would obliterate them – he would judge them.

Friends, **that was the best thing that the old covenant could provide! It could only provide judgment! It could only provide a presence of God that was veiled to our hard hearts. AND COULD ONLY DELAY THE JUDGEMENT THAT WAS DUE US.**

Paul says this again in the next 2 verses. Verses 14-15 says,

“But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.”

So friends, the hardness of heart that separated Israel from God in ancient times, is the same hardness of heart that separates them from God at the present time. The obstinate heart that separated Israel from God in the Old Testament, is the same obstinate heart that separates Israel from God in the New Testament. The glory on Moses’ face that Israel couldn’t see in the

Old Testament, is the same Glory that Israel can't see ON JESUS' FACE in the New Testament. 2 mediators, 2 covenants, same glory. Cant see it.

Paul says, "Look, Israel's hearts haven't changed! They still can't see God's glory! They couldn't see it on the face of Moses, and now they cant see it on the face of Jesus Christ! They couldn't see it on the Old Covenant mediator, and now they cant see it on the New Covenant mediator!

Because of this spiritual blindness, they can't even see God's glory in the scriptures! They cant see what the scriptures are all about! They cant see that the scriptures are all about Jesus because they have hard hearts! They cant see that the light of God's face is reflected on Jesus' face to give us all of God's blessing. They cant see it because they have hard hearts.

Friends, let me just be straight with you: if you don't see Jesus as beautiful and glorious, and you never have – the Bible says that is because you have a HARD HEART, and you need to be saved. This hard heart isn't just a lack of love for God; it's the INABILITY to love God and know God. It means that you can't see his beauty – it's veiled from the eyes of your soul. It also means that you love other things more than him. It means that what makes you feel good comes before what God tells you is good. It means that disobeying your parents comes before honoring your father and mother as God commanded you. It means lashing out in anger comes before being patient with your wife. It means that living with your girlfriend comes before waiting for marriage. It means coveting the next best thing, comes before working diligently for God. It means our peace of mind comes before disciplining our kids. It means that we see sin as more pleasurable than obeying God. That is what a hard heart is CHARACTERIZED BY. And we are all born this way.

You want to know the proof of that? Some of us are already saying in our minds right now, "Man, I'm so glad Jesse is bringing this up; my wife really needs to here this. My sister, my kid really needs to hear this. I'm actually good on this right now compared to them." Friends, let me tell you, if you are measuring your goodness based on being better than people, you may

have a hard heart. A soft heart recognizes its sin and measures it up against God whose standard is perfection.

On this basis, we are all born into the world with hard hearts that don't just NOT love God, but CAN'T love God. We are all sinners, and we all deserve to die for our sins. All of us. I don't care if your sin is different than mine → we all have sin and so we all deserve God to cut off his glory from us. We all deserve the veil we receive, that hides the glory of God from us.

Under the Old Covenant we are condemned.

But I have good news for you friends; it doesn't have to stay that way! If we repent of our sins and our hard hearts, God will save us! He will give us new hearts that are soft and that love him, and that turn towards him rather than turn inward towards ourselves. I don't care how far you are into sin; I don't care how engrained your lifestyle. If you turn away from that lifestyle, and turn to trust in Jesus, God will save you and give you a new love for what HE says is good.

These verses reveal that Moses brought a covenant of condemnation. But, if we turn to Christ, then we are no longer under condemnation! Although God should sit on his judgement seat, bring down the gavel and say "guilty" over you and me, instead he say "righteous, and pure, and my son!" over you and me, if we trust in Christ.

So since, you're not under condemnation, you can be bold for the gospel! You share a message that releases people from condemnation, and gives them grace to live in the freedom of the gospel.

That's the first two reasons why we should boldly proclaim the Gospel: because we have a SURE HOPE, and we are NOT UNDER CONDEMNATION – if we trust in Christ.

Lastly, we should boldly proclaim the Gospel,

3) BECAUSE our hearts have been unveiled

In one last turn of events, Paul uses the story of Moses to describe the Christian story. He CONTRASTS Moses' unveiling of his face to our story of redemption. He does this in verse 16, which says,

*"But when one turns to the Lord, **the veil is removed.***

Just like Moses wore a veil over his face, and then took it off when he turned to the Lord in the tabernacle, so our veils are taken off when we turn to the Lord! This is a picture of conversion! When we turn away from our sin and turn to the Lord Jesus, the veil over our hearts fall off. Our hardness of heart is softened when we turn to Christ. And for the first time, we see Jesus as glorious and awesome. God opens up our eyes to see the sinfulness of our sin, and to see the beauty of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is the work of the Spirit in us, and is often called "illumination". As God the Spirit softens our hearts, he gives us spiritual perception that we have never had before.

And how is this experience described, by Paul? Look at the next verse.

He says in verse 17,

*"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, **there is freedom.**"*

This is what conversion looks like friends: FREEDOM. FROM a hardness of heart, FROM condemnation and FROM death. And more than that, you are free FOR a relationship with God. You have a freedom of COMMUNICATION with God. The Bible says that similar to how Moses freely talked to God, we can freely talk to God now! God spoke with Moses as a man does with

his friend the Bible says. Exodus says that he spoke “mouth to mouth” with Moses. And Deuteronomy says that he spoke “face to face” with Moses.

Now although, we don’t often hear God speak audible words to us, God the Spirit lives inside of us, and we should expect him to talk to us in multiple ways. That’s what God did with Moses. And so we should expect him to speak to us by guiding us, convicting us, and reminding us of what Jesus said in the Bible.

Now our western mindset doesn’t like that idea very much. The idea that we can actually talk to God and receive divine guidance from him directly sounds far too mystical and scary. Right? For our Canadian tastes, we like things to be concrete and physical, and something that we can scientifically evaluate in a test tube. But God wants to have a relationship with his people (and you can’t put a relationship in a test tube!). A relationship means having 2-way communication with God, where we pray to God and he responds – maybe not audibly, but in a variety of ways that scripture shows us he speaks to us.

And lastly – and perhaps best of all – the Spirit of God frees us to become like Christ. Verse 18 says,

*“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,^[e] **are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.**^[f] For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*

As we behold the glory of the Lord – instead of being judged for our sin – we are being transformed into the same image of the Lord. We are being saved, progressively, and in degrees, over time, from indwelling sin. We become like Christ! This transformation is like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly; it’s metamorphosis. Day by day, becoming more like Christ, until finally, after our last day – when we meet Jesus – we are made perfect in his image. We become the butterfly – so to speak. But until that day we are IN PROCESS → we’re in the

cocoon. This transformation comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Who shows us Christ and makes us like Christ, as we behold him in the gospel and in the scriptures.

This is the final reason Paul gives for us to boldly share the gospel. He says, “because YOUR HEART HAS BEEN UNVEILED!” By the Holy Spirit, you can see the glory of the Father on the face of Jesus Christ. You have access to God! And that is FREEDOM.

So we should boldly share the good news about Jesus because **1) you have a SURE HOPE, 2) you’re NOT UNDER CONDEMNATION, and because 3) our hearts have been UNVEILED.**

So now that the Glory of God has been unveiled to you, let it shine towards OTHERS. DON’T HIDE IT AND COVER IT UP! Put it on display for your coworkers and schoolmates, and neighbours to see! Proclaim it from your kitchen tables to our kids, and share it with fellow mechanics during lunchtime. When you’re on break with your buddies at the Ford Plant or when there’s a lull in the day while framing a house, take that 5 minutes to share the SURE HOPE you have in Jesus Christ, even when everything else feels hopeless. Use Twitter, use Facebook, use Instagram; use WHATEVER PLATFORM you have to unveil Jesus Christ to hard hearts. We have a ministry of unveiling. And if today, you want God to change your hard heart into a soft heart that loves him, don’t leave this room without trusting in Jesus. Don’t leave this room without turning from your sin, repenting of your sin, and turning to Jesus Christ.

The Bible is clear that whosoever believes in Jesus Christ will have this New Heart. So come, will you? Turn away from you sins and turn to Jesus. Let him heal you. It won’t hurt; the only thing that we need to let die is our pride.

And if you haven’t been bold for Jesus – even though you have this SURE HOPE – confess that to the Lord. Ask him, and he will give you the boldness you need to unveil his glory to your neighbours.

And if you – even though have access to God – you don't behold his glory in the scriptures and through prayer, turn to Christ! He will give you all the help you need to behold him – and to do perhaps the most important thing in all the world – behold Christ by reading the scriptures.

This is the glorious new Covenant. This is the boldness God gives us in evangelism. And this is the good news of the gospel.

Let's Pray.

Prayer: God, make us bold for you. And if anyone is here today that has a heart of stone, would you miraculously unveil their hearts to see the sinfulness of their sin and your beauty on Jesus' face, and would give them a heart of flesh. I pray that you would grant them repentance, draw them to yourself and give them FREEDOM. In Jesus name, Amen.

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