

To the Glory of God Alone

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[0 : 00] Thanks to Cody for planning the service and for leading it up to this point. I should say at the beginning that this is a very traumatic day for me.

It's my birthday. I'm 65 today, so officially, and an old age pensioner. Leviticus 19:32, show respect to the man with grey hair and show honour to the face of the old man.

There's been a delay in my pension. I sent the thing in on time, phoned a week ago and they said for some reason mine has not been processed, so it'll be several weeks late.

So the ushers will be going round a little later on and I hope that you will feel moved to contribute. Now, tonight we're going to be in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and 4.

If you can turn to that for the fifth and final Sola in this series, Glory to God Alone. So open your Bible or your smartphone to 2 Corinthians 3 and 4.

[1 : 29] Any smartphone will do, but the free church's preferred version is a Samsung. I think it's funny.

2 Corinthians, let me just read verse 6 of chapter 4. For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now just a few minutes ago, Corey read several doxologies from the writings of Paul. A doxology is a glory saying, a passage in which someone celebrates something about God and ascribes all the glory to the God who is so glorious.

Now tonight what I want us to do is to do the same kind of thing. To be moved to give glory to God because we have seen something of the glory of God.

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, the great reformer John Calvin spoke of the glory of God displayed in the cross as in a theater. He says, in the cross of Christ, as in a magnificent theater, the inestimable goodness of God is displayed.

[3 : 05] Nowhere has God's glory shone more brightly than in the cross. So think of that image of the theater, of the stage. As we watch the story of redemption, we see the glory, we see the splendor, the radiance, the weightiness, the worthiness of God on the stage in one scene after another.

How should we respond to that glory without applause? We contribute nothing to the drama of redemption. God does it all, but the more we see of his glory in it, the more we want to applaud him, give him the glory.

So at its simplest, I'm suggesting to you that doxology is our bursting into applause for every scene in redemption accomplished and applied and enjoyed.

So let's look at the glory of God in this passage. I'm going to try and survey chapters 3 and 4 as time allows. And I don't think there's a passage in the New Testament that's more suffused with glory language in different ways than this one.

So the question we're asking is what from these two chapters are we being called to glory in, to give glory for? And I want to suggest five things, the glory of the day, of the book, of the face, of the song, and of the hope.

[4 : 55] I'd like to do at least three of them, but we'll see how we go. I mean, Luther would have had 95, so just be grateful. So first of all, the glory of the day.

Read verse 11 of chapter 3. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

Paul is ministering in a new day. That's why I use the language of the glory of the day. He is a minister of the new covenant, as he says in verse 6.

Now, if you look at verses 3 and 6, and if you know a little about the Old Testament prophets, the predictions of two of these prophets seem to be in Paul's mind. Ezekiel 36, 26 and 27, God says that he will one day remove the heart of stone, give a heart of flesh, put my spirit within you. Paul picks up on all these phrases. And then Jeremiah 31, 31 to 34, God says, I will make a new covenant. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.

[6 : 24] You see, the point is that Paul here is self-consciously ministering in a new day, in the day of new covenant fulfillment.

And he will call this new epoch the day of salvation. Chapter 6 and verse 2, he quotes from Isaiah, and then he says, behold, now is the favorable time.

Behold, now is the day of salvation. You live, as Paul lived, in the same day spiritually, the day of salvation, the day of grace.

Now, we're often profoundly grateful for the day in which we live. I often think it, when I watch TV programs or movies set in the past, and somebody's getting, you know, a wisdom tooth pulled out, or their legs on off, or something done to them without anesthetic, without really anybody knowing what they're doing.

And I just give thanks that medically we live in the age in which we do. So how grateful we should be that we live spiritually in the age in which we do, in the day of grace.

[7 : 45] Now, in verses 7 and following, Paul picks up on an old covenant story in Exodus. Moses at Sinai, he's doing this to contrast the ministries of the old and new covenants.

And his focus is on what we read earlier, the end of Exodus 34, when Moses returned from the mountain the second time, his face shining with reflected glory. So Paul is saying, glory attended the giving of the law in old covenant times, and that glory, verse 7, was such that the Israelites couldn't gaze at Moses' face.

So Paul is saying, if glory splendor marked the old day, how much greater must be the glory splendor of the new day? And in fact, according to verse 10, he says, there's no comparison, because the glory of the new day, the new covenant, is so all surpassing.

Now, he says various things that show how he sees the new covenant as superior to the old. I can't go through them in detail, but just mention three things.

First of all, verses 7 and 8, the new covenant is in a special way the ministry of the spirit. Secondly, verse 9, it's the ministry of righteousness.

[9 : 13] The righteousness of Jesus gives us a right standing before God. You can flip over to chapter 5, verse 21, and see what Paul says about that righteousness.

And then thirdly, verse 11, the new covenant is, quote, what is permanent. The new covenant will never be superseded.

Paul has told these Corinthians in his first letter in chapter 11 that that covenant is in the blood of Christ. The wine of the supper speaks of the new covenant sealed in his blood.

The blood of Jesus seals the permanence of the new covenant, the day in which we live. So, something new and final has come in Christ.

That's what Paul is saying. He's saying, I live in a new day because of Jesus. And I say to you tonight in the authority of God's word, we live in a new day, the same day, the day of grace, because of Jesus.

[10 : 24] Jesus came and his coming was a calendar changer, a game changer, and we need to appreciate where we are in the story of redemption.

And I believe that one of the things that Reformation did was recover this perspective. When you first hear this, it may be a strange way to put it, but as I look at the pre-Reformation church that so needed to be reformed, I see it in all kinds of ways as very old covenant.

It had buildings that were modeled on the temple. It had its priestly cast of special men, always men, doing special things in special clothes at special places.

It had a sacrifice of the mass. It had its complex calendar of high days and holy days, and it had its many, many mediators.

Now all of that was fulfilled in Jesus. That was all from God's word in the Old Testament, the Old Covenant. But all these things were looking to Jesus, and the temple has been fulfilled in Jesus.

[11 : 45] And that priesthood has been fulfilled in Jesus, and the sacrifices have been fulfilled in Jesus. And all these high days have been fulfilled in Jesus, and all these mediators were pointing to Jesus.

And also, over the centuries, that church had also begun to mirror what had happened in the times between Old Testament and New Testament, when Jewish people had added all kinds of things to the Bible.

So the church had added further sacraments, and had added further mediators, like the departed saints, or Mary, the mother of God. And reformers do away with all of this, and they say, we live in a new day, when Jesus has come, and Jesus has fulfilled all this.

And we're not going to add anything to Jesus, we're not going to add anything to the Bible, there's no Jesus plus, it's just Jesus. And His word, He's done it all, and we rest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says here in chapter 1 and verse 20, for all the promises of God find there yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our amen to God for His glory.

[13:15] Glory! We glorify God. We ascribe all the glory to Him, because of the day in which we live, the day of Christ, the day of grace.

Jesus has done it all. We live in the new day which dawned with His first coming, and which will end with His return at close of day.

So to God be the glory for the day in which we live. Secondly, the glory of the book. Let me read now from verse 18.

And 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, for this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

The glory of the book. Now that verse says nothing about the book you may be thinking, but if you follow with me from verse 12, I think it's clear that Paul is talking about the Scriptures.

[14:29] In verses 12 then and following, Paul continues with the story of Moses veiling his shining face. And as I read it, he seems to draw an analogy between that veil and the veil which lies over the minds and hearts of most of his fellow Jews as they read or hear the Scriptures.

So he says in verse 14, when they read the Old Covenant, that same veil remains unlifted. And in verse 15, he's saying that even when their beloved Moses is read in the synagogue, quote, a veil lies over their hearts.

He's saying that they cannot read their own Scriptures properly. Their minds and hearts are veiled to the glory. They cannot see the glory there in their Scriptures.

So how can they be made to see clearly, only if they're given eyes to see Messiah Jesus? Verse 14, he says only through Christ is it, that's the veil, taken away.

Or verse 16, he says when anyone turns, that's the New Testament language of conversion, to the Lord, that's Jesus. When anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. So he's saying that Christ is the key to Scripture.

[16:00] So, if you're with me, verse 18, thus when he says of believers, we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, in the context he's been talking about the reading of Scripture.

And I think he's saying that we as Christians behold the glory of the Lord in the book, as we properly read the book and see Jesus in the book, as we read with unveiled faces, as we hear the Scriptures being read and taught, as we expose ourselves to their teaching, like someone turning a diamond in the light, we see yet another facet of the glory of Jesus in the book.

That glory that we're seeing is the glory of the Lord, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Holy Spirit exercising his ministry of focusing on Jesus as we read the Bible with the Spirit.

The Spirit enables us to see the beauty of Christ and to see even more of the beauty of Christ as we read his word with unveiled faces.

But there's something more being said here as well in verse 18. The book is not just for admiration, as if we were viewers in an art gallery saying, isn't that beautiful?

[17:28] Paul says in verse 18 that the Scriptures are for transformation, for sanctification. Verse 18 is saying what the Scriptures are meant to do in our lives.

Quote, And 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.

You see, God wants to display something of his glory in the lives of his people. And he uses the Scriptures to do this.

The Bible is meant to change us. That's what the book is for. That's why we come here and gather around this book. That's why we read it every day.

It's meant to change us. And note in the text, this is for all Christians. Verse 18 at the beginning says, we all. Now remember again, this is all to do with a contrast with the Moses story.

[18 : 35] In the Moses story, only one person had a shining glory face. But Paul is saying in verse 18 that we all are meant to shine with glory.

This glory of transformation through the Bible is for all the people of God. Now, of course, in all this talk of change, none of us is what we would like to be.

It's progressive transformation, it's progressive sanctification. See the language of verse 18? We are being changed. Each of us is a work in progress.

We may feel a bit like roadworks in Edinburgh, but God is at work. I remember a year or two ago, walking around the city with an American friend.

And every other building seemed to have scaffolding. And there were roadworks everywhere. I think it was during the tramworks. And he just said, this will be a great city when it's finished.

[19 : 46] And you'll be a great Christian when God is finished working in your life. It's a progressive transformation that is never complete in this life. But one day it will be complete.

And notice that this transformation, again Christ is central, it's into the likeness of Jesus. Beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image.

The image of the Lord, the image of Jesus. So, beholding means becoming. A right reading of the Bible with a focus on Jesus and with a desire to become more like Jesus.

That's holiness defined, isn't it? Exhibiting more of the beauty of Christ, more of the fruit of His Spirit. Jesus is the definition of holiness, of what we want to be.

And the Spirit, through the word, as we behold Jesus in the word, and let the Son and the Spirit change us day by day.

[20 : 56] We are being changed, hopefully, more and more into the image of Jesus. And again, to God be the glory. For all the glory that we see in the book, God deserves the glory.

For all the glory that is true in your life, or all the transformation that you see in the life of one of your friends. To God be the glory.

It all depends on God. It's all done by God, by His Spirit, through His word, in honor of His Son. To God be the glory.

Then thirdly, the glory of the face. Let me read verse 6 of chapter 4 again. For God has said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Darkness and light. Actually, this is one of the motifs of the Reformation in a sense. It goes back to Geneva and to coins that were minted after the Reformation.

[22 : 14] And they said, post-Tenbrass looks, after darkness light. And the symbolism of darkness and light has often been associated with the Reformation movement.

And here it is. Now in this paragraph, Paul is reminding us that he's a preacher, preacher of the glorious gospel. And in verse 2, he says that he's a preacher who refuses to manipulate people or to manipulate the message.

But he simply presents the truth as clearly as he can knowing that God is watching him. But then the question arises, if the message is so glorious, and if it's being presented with such integrity and such clarity, why do people not see the beauty of the gospel?

Well, Paul returns in verse 3 here to the language of the veil. And then in verse 40 he says it is because the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel.

I think the God of this age here is a reference to the devil. Some take it in other ways, one of the most popular is to say that it's people who take this age as their God.

[23 : 42] But I think it's a more personal thing here. And also I think it because, remember that Paul in one of his tellings of his conversion and commission story in the book of Acts, says that Jesus says to him that he is being sent to be an instrument to turn people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

It's very like the language here, Satan, the devil, the God of this age. So I think what Paul is saying is there's a spiritual battle going on in all evangelism, in all mission, in a sort of overlap of the ages. Because people are living in two different calendars really. There's the God of this age, this present spiritually evil age in which most people live.

And there's also the God with a capital G of the new spiritual day that's arrived in Christ. And there's this overlap of the ages.

And so this warfare is going on and Paul's a realist and he knows that the devil is busy in his implacable hostility to the gospel. There's a war on, a war from people's hearts and minds.

[25 : 13] And in that war the devil is busy blinding people to the beauty of Christ. But Paul believes in the God who can make people see the face of Christ in all its glory.

Now I want just a glance here at verses 4 and 6 which are full of this glory language in relation to Jesus.

And I'm just going to touch on three of the obvious implications I think of these verses. I originally had seven and then I cut it to five and now I've cut it to three. So I hope you're grateful.

I could do the seven if you were wondering what to do with that extra hour that you've been given today. We could spend it in this. But three things. First of all, Christ reveals who God is.

I want you to look at the parallel expressions at the end of 4 and 6. The glory of Christ who is the image of God verse 4 and verse 6.

[26 : 27] The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Don't they look like parallel expressions? The glory of Christ who is the image of God, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Just think about that parallel language for the moment of image and face. Image, Christ is the image of God. He perfectly reflects God.

And face, when we see his face, we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So Jesus Christ really does reveal God.

This is what God is truly like. Now I need to take a minute to, I think, highlight that because today we use that very language so differently.

When we talk about image and face in a world of spin, we will say image, oh yeah, that's the image they want to present.

[27 : 36] Or face, we'll say, oh that's the public face they want the media to see. But we say the image isn't real, the face isn't real.

But the point here, the way that Paul is using the language is the exact opposite of that. He's saying in Jesus we really do see God.

Jesus, the Son, is the absolute image of his Father. His face is the face of God incarnate.

There is no God behind Jesus who is different from Jesus. In the face of Jesus in the Gospel, in the face of Jesus at Golgotha, in the face of Jesus exalted on the throne of heaven.

There is made visible in the face of Jesus the eternal heart of the only God that is in the universe. In Jesus we see God truly.

[28 : 51] It was a famous theologian at New College some years ago, the late T.F. Torrance, Tom Torrance.

And he used often, I heard him tell a story, about when he was a Padre during the Second World War with Allied forces.

At one stage he was in, somewhere in Italy, and he was on a battlefield and a boy had been mortally wounded, one of our soldiers.

And the boy was dying. They both knew that the young man was dying. And all the young man wanted to ask was one question.

He had clearly been moved by Tom's preaching presentation of the Gospel in Jesus. And he'd come to trust this Jesus.

[29 : 50] But as he died he had one question. He says, is God really like Jesus? And Tom said yes he is.

And the boy died in peace. The boy knew he was going to meet God. He loved Jesus. The Jesus that Tom had presented to him, but he had this question. Is the God I'm going to meet in a few minutes?

Is he really like Jesus? And when Tom said yes, he dies in peace. Jesus reveals the real God, the only God.

We see God in the face of Jesus. Secondly here, to become a Christian is to have the lights go on. Paul here keeps you talking about light.

And I think he has in mind something of his own experience on the Damascus road. His own encounter with the light, with the glory, with Jesus as Lord.

[30 : 54] But he broadens the experience by saying in verse 6, has shone in our hearts. He saw the light on the Damascus road. But he's saying actually that the experience is for every Christian. That Jesus shines into our hearts. For every Christian, as for Paul, in your conversion the lights have gone on.

It's such a part of him, isn't it? And can it be by Charles Wesley? I woke the dungeon, flamed with light.

Poor Hank Williams. I saw the light. It's just right through all kinds of Christian music. The switch on of the lights, not just for Christmas but for all time in my life.

And what Paul is saying is that these lights have gone on at the very centre of my being, my heart. What makes me tick? That's your heart.

[32 : 05] What makes you tick? And the lights have gone on at the very centre of your being. And that changes the light in which you see everything.

Christian conversion is the light going on. And then thirdly, to become a Christian is a creative miracle. If you look at verse 6, it can only be done by the God who first called light out of darkness. He says that explicitly. He must shine into our spiritual chaos and darkness to give this new light. So it's a creative act. It's a miracle of divine power possible by his energy alone.

He says it in another way over the page in chapter 5, verses 17 and 18. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he, she is a new creation.

The old is gone. The new has come. So if Christian conversion is a powerful creative act of omnipotence, then obviously to God alone be the glory.

[33 : 21] Because only God could do this and God has done it. So we give God all the glory for every single conversion. Because every conversion, every moment when somebody new has seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus and the lights have gone on for them spiritually forever.

It's a miracle, a miracle of creation and God deserves the glory. If anybody here is not a Christian and maybe you felt in some ways God speaking to you through his word, God nudging you through things happening in your life.

Perhaps you felt that God has been working in some strange way in your life. If he has, then by his grace it's time simply to turn around and look into the face of Christ.

I mean, if you're walking out that door at the end of the service and you feel somebody put their hand on your shoulder, what do you do? You turn around and look at them.

And look at them. Well, if you felt the hand of God in any way on your life, then you're called to turn around and look into the face of the God who's touched your life in some way.

[34 : 51] He wants to speak to you. He wants you to look into his face, into the face of glory. Well, let's come forthly very quickly and then fifthly.

I may hardly say anything but number four. Four is the glory of the song. I realize I'm rushing through a lot of this. It's probably really five sermons, but you really don't want to hear me five times in a row on five Sunday evenings.

The glory of the song. Here, let me read verse 15 of chapter four for it is all for your sake. So that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

Now here for these verses seven to 15, I'm using this image of choir and a song of thanksgiving.

The picture in my mind is that every new Christian joins us choir and sings our thanksgiving to God. That's what Paul is saying in verse 15, as the message of grace touches more and more lives. So these converts swell the chorus of those who express their thanks to God, and that is all to the glory of God.

[36 : 12] Mission creates worshippers. Mission creates people who want to give the glory to God.

Paul began the section verse seven by comparing the gospel to treasure and preachers of the gospel to jars of clay. Jars of clay that are inexpensive and easily broken, and Paul is saying we are jars of clay who depend wholly on the power of God.

And on the gospel as treasure, we're reminded that Luther's thesis number 62 was the true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

And then in the section that I won't go through, Paul focuses on his own suffering for the gospel because he's a theologian of the cross.

And he refused to short circuit that, and he lives with the dying of Jesus in his body, he's saying. And he's willing to suffer to reach new people with the gospel.

[37 : 27] But Martin Luther loved Paul for being a theologian of the cross. And Jesus theology was suffering and then glory. And Paul's theology is suffering to glory.

And there's no diversion around that cross-centered message, no sort of alternative scenic route around that cross-baiting life and ministry for Paul. So verse 15 says, it is all for your sake.

He's saying that all his suffering and the cause of the gospel is for their sake and for the sake of people like them. That people might be touched and transformed by grace and join the choir, add their voices to the thanksgiving chorus, and become people who give the glory to God.

That's the exact opposite of what people are by nature according to Paul. In Romans 1, Paul says that sinners by nature do not glorify him as God or give thanks to him.

But he's saying through the gospel, he's seeing more and more people come to give thanks to him for his glory. So it's clear that Paul's zeal in mission is motivated supremely by his passion for the glory of God in Christ.

[38 : 52] He wants God to have the glory. And so he wants to reach more and more people so that they might see the glory of Jesus and then join the choir and sing their songs of glory to Jesus.

That God might have all the glory in Christ, a passion for the glory of God. That is what will always best motivate our mission as individuals, as a church, as churches.

That we love Jesus. We've seen the glory. We want other people to see the glory. We know that he deserves all the glory and we wish that everybody would give Jesus the glory that he deserves, motivated by a passion for the glory of God in Christ.

The glory of the song. And then fifthly, the glory of the hope. Chapter 4 in verse 17. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

We look to a glory above and a glory to come and all to the glory of God. Verse 16, Paul says that outwardly he's wasting away. The process is irresistible, but inwardly he's being renewed day by day.

[40 : 15] One is obvious to people on the outside, the other isn't so obvious what's happening on the inside, but they're both real. And he insists that his affliction here is light and momentary, light and comparison with the weight of the glory he's going to receive, and momentary and comparison with eternity of the glory he is going to receive.

He's just, as some of us say, he's doing the sums. As others, if you might say, he's doing the math. He's saying that beyond this life, what felt so heavy here will seem so light from there.

And what felt so endless here will seem so brief from there. And that will be glory, he says, beyond all comparison, beyond hyperbole.

I don't have time to go through what Paul is saying here about that world to come. I think at the beginning of chapter 5, he's talking about an immediate state, immediately beyond death, we go to be with the Lord.

But in verse 14 here of chapter 4, he's talking about resurrection. As the body of Jesus was raised, we will be raised to live bodily in His presence forever. Philippians 3:21, who will transform our lowly body to be like His body of glory.

[41 : 40] Our destiny is glory, to go to a place of glory with glorified resurrected bodies in a renewed creation which will be the theatre of God's glory forever.

I'm not sure if I'm allowed to mention a Catholic philosopher in a Reformation celebration. But Bruce Springsteen has a song called Glory Days about a guy who used to be a baseball star at high school.

And a girl used to be a woman who used to be the prettiest girl at high school. And everybody was jealous of the baseball star, everybody was jealous of the prettiest girl.

But now they're much older and they each think back often to the old days and to the glory days with wishing things were the way they used to be. Their glory days are all in the past.

Glory days, well they'll pass you by. Glory days in the wink of a young girl's eye, glory days, glory days. But for us the ultimate glory days are ahead.

[42 : 59] Endless glory days when we will shine with glory, when everything will shine with glory in a renewed world. When we will give God all the glory and when we will see face to face in the beatific vision, the glory of God, physically in the face of Jesus Christ.

So to God be the glory forever and ever. I did have a conclusion with three further points but I think I'll just say amen.