

“No Guts - No Glory”
2 Corinthians 3:7-18

No guts - no glory.

He said, “Stand right there. Now, look at me. Look at me . . .”

So I looked at him. I thought he might say, “This won’t hurt a bit.”

Instead, he said, “Look at me. This will hurt a lot. This will take all you’ve got. Look at me.”

So I looked at him again - more intensely this time - and the longer I looked the brighter he became.

And the brighter he became, the more I saw him for who he is.

And the more I saw him for who he is the more I saw me for who I was:

Broken, wounded, sinful, selfish, prideful, stubborn, isolated, withdrawn:

Blotchy imperfection in the presence of pure glory.

He saw me that way, too - but wanted me to stay, anyway. So I stayed.

I looked into his eyes and he looked into my heart.

And then I began change – or better – he began to change me:

My brokenness was made whole
My woundedness was healed

My sinfulness was cleansed
My selfishness - forgiven
My pridefulness was humbled
My stubbornness was melted
My isolation was engaged
My being withdrawn - embraced

I was “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord” and was being “transformed into the same image from glory to glory.”

The apostle Paul had something similar in mind when he wrote his letter to the Christians in Corinth.

The Corinthian Christians were struggling with living out their faith. They were wrestling with spiritual pride and immaturity. They were falling short of their potential in Christ. And, they weren't always sure what to make of the apostle Paul.

Paul took their condition and their concerns head on. He reminded them of who he was in Christ, of whom they were in Christ, and of whom they were all called to be.

Then he took them on a theological field trip. First, he wanted them think about Moses and the time he was with God on Mt. Sinai.

You can read the story in Exodus 24-34, but let me remind us of the details.

- Moses was invited by God to the mountaintop to receive “stone tablets with the law and the commandment” God had written for the Israelites’ instruction. (Ex. 24:12)
- While Moses was gone, the people got restless; then they got rebellious; and then they set up their own religion.

- Moses came down from the mountain, broke the tablets, melted the gold calf, called the people to repentance, and interceded with God on their behalf.

And in the middle of all that mess, Moses said to God, “Show me your glory” (Ex. 33:18).

God said to him, “You cannot see my face and live. But there’s a place in the rock where you can stand and see my glory as I pass by” (Ex. 33:20-23).

So the next day, Moses found a place to stand and then God passed by in front of him. And Moses bowed down and worshipped God.

What Moses didn’t know was that his facing was shining, glowing radiantly because he had been in God’s presence. So when went back down the mountain, the people couldn’t look at him because his face was so bright. But they knew he had been with God.

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Paul also knew what it was like to see the glorified presence of God and live.

While on his way to Damascus to persecute some Christians, Paul was knocked off his horse by the blinding light of the presence of the Lord.

God was gracious to him, too. He offered Paul a new life. God called him to move in a new direction. And as Mike Goff said in his Christian Preaching sermon, “One brief encounter with the risen Christ and Paul realized he was so in the dark that it took him three days to regain his sight.”

Like Moses, Paul was never the same. He spent the rest of his life shining the light of God into darkened places, revealing the light of Gospel to whoever would listen, and trusting that light to lead him as he made his way home.

But unlike Moses, Paul's face didn't shine. The folks knew he had been with God through the way he lived his life.

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However, Paul's theology field trip didn't end there. The good news that Paul had for the Corinthian Christians was that seeing God's glory wasn't reserved just for the privileged few, just for the saints, just for ministers and missionaries.

Beholding the glory of the Lord was for every believer. But instead of it killing them, it would bring them life. Instead of wiping them out, it would fulfill who they were meant to be. Instead of destroying them, it would make them whole and holy.

And so Paul wrote:

“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 from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

The verse describes what was happening in the lives of those who were fixing their gaze on the Lord. But it was also an invitation for those folks who weren't beholding the glory of the Lord to do so.

However, the glory of the Lord Paul was saying they could behold was not a blinding light. It was not flash of lightning. It was not a luminous presence. It wouldn't leave their faces glowing so bright that no one can look at them.

No, “the glory of the Lord” that every Christian in Corinth could behold was Jesus, “the glorified, reflected image of God” (Barnett).

The Apostle John said it was so: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

One writer put it this way (Hughes):

To see Him [Jesus] is to see the Father.

To behold His [Jesus'] glory is to behold the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

To contemplate Him [Jesus] who is in the Father's image is . . . to be transformed into that image.

The effect of the continuous beholding is that we are continuously being transformed . . . into the likeness of Christ - and increasingly so: from glory to glory.

Need to clarify one thing here. The glory Paul wrote about may not be the “glory” we think it is.

This glory is not an honor,
it's not a medal,
it's not an award,
it's not about being noticed.

This glory is not about glowing faces,
it's not about earning praises,
it's not about being adored,
it's about not trophies and rewards.

This glory is not about us - it's about Jesus and being changed into his likeness.

So “being transformed from glory to glory” means
Being transformed from Christ-likeness to Christ-likeness,
Being transformed from Jesus-ness to Jesus-ness.

So, how do we do this? How do we “behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord?”

We could make a new list of rules to live by.

We could sell all we have and join a monastery.

We could decide it's too hard to do, and just do the best we can.

We could ignore this open invitation, go on our way, and leave this glory stuff to someone else.

Or we can do what Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

To continuously behold the glory of the Lord is to live each day, each moment for Him.

In *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Brennan Manning asks these questions:

How long will it be before we discover that we cannot dazzle God with our accomplishments?

When will we acknowledge that we need not and can not buy God's favor?

When will we acknowledge that we don't have it all together and happily accept the gift of grace?

When will we listen to Jesus when he says to us:

“Stand right there. Now, look at me. Look at me . . . This will hurt a lot. This will take all you've got. Look at me.”

When we do, he will continue the process of transforming us from glory to glory.

One final thing must be said.

The glory to glory process will continue until the coming in person of the Lord of glory himself. When He appears, we shall behold Him face to face and our transformation into His image will be complete.

Like the apostle John wrote in his first letter, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

What are will willing to give to be changed into his image? What are we willing to do to be transformed into Christ-likeness? Who are we willing to be in order to be changed from glory to glory?

A Spanish mystic, Miguelde Unamuno, ends his book *The Tragic Sense of Life* with this prayer: “May God deny you peace and give you glory.”

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