

# BEHOLDING THE GLORY

SERIES: EXODUS: JOURNEY TO  
FREEDOM



Catalog No. 20230528  
Exodus 34:29-35  
25th Message  
Scott Grant  
May 28, 2023

*Exodus 34:29-35*

The song insisted that Jesus was “here in plain view” and that to see him, all you had to do was “take a look” and “open your eyes.”

Written by John Fischer, who was part of this church, the song was called “Have You Seen Jesus My Lord?” When I was a teenager, we sang it regularly in my youth group with all our hearts.

Is it true? Is Jesus here in plain view? Can you see him?

The answers matter greatly, because the Scriptures tell us that seeing Jesus, even beholding the face of Jesus, is an important component of becoming more like Jesus.

Do you want to be more like Jesus? If so, read on. Let’s see if we can see him.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments, he threw them, and they shattered at the foot of the mountain. After making intercession, Moses again comes down from the mountain with new tablets containing the same commandments. What awaits him this time?

## Down from the mountain

**Exodus 34:29-30:**

**When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.**

This time is different.

First, Moses’ face is shining “because he had been talking with God.” When Moses went up the mountain the first time, he also talked with God. However, when he came down from the mountain then, his face wasn’t shining. Moses’ face now reflects the glory of God.

Why the change? Although Moses talked with the Lord the first time, his encounter with God this time is more intense in the wake of the people’s idolatry. Moreover, this time he got a glimpse of the Lord’s glory—a brief view of his “back.” Furthermore, after the golden calf, Moses’ role as mediator of the covenant has intensified. At first, though, Moses is unaware of his new condition.

Second, when Moses came down from the mountain the first time, the narrator reported that he “saw” the golden calf and the people dancing in worship. This time, the narrator does not report that Moses sees a golden calf (there’s no golden calf to see); instead, he reports what the people “saw”: Moses’ shining face.

Everyone, including Aaron, Moses’ brother, is now afraid to approach Moses. They recognize that Moses’ face reflects the glory of God, who had already warned them not to “come near” to him (Exodus 24:2). Even before that, when the people saw and heard manifestations of God in thunder, lightning, a trumpet, and smoke, they trembled and were intent on standing far off as Moses drew near to God (Exodus 20:18-21).

It is well and good that we should fear God, recognizing that by all rights, in view of his holiness, we should be dead. However, now that Christ has come, the writer of Hebrews encourages us to draw near to God:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19-22).

The people are afraid to come near to Moses. How does he respond?

## Reflecting the glory

**Exodus 34:31-33:**

**But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. 32 Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.**

Moses, now reflecting the glory of God, represents God to the people. He calls to them, just as God called to him (Exodus 3:4; 19:3, 20; 24:16). They come near to him, just as he came near to God. He talks with them, just as God talked to him. First, Aaron and the leaders approach Moses; then all the people do so.

On the one hand, the narrator doesn't report what Moses said to Aaron and the leaders; on the other hand, he reports what Moses said to everyone: the commandments he received from the Lord on Mount Sinai.

When Moses finishes conveying to the people the commandments, he puts a veil over his face. Why? He didn't put a veil over his face after coming down from the mountain the first time, but his face wasn't shining then. Moses' purpose must have something to do with his new skin condition.

## Protective measure

**Exodus 34:34-35:**

**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, 35 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.**

When Moses came down from the mountain the second time and conveyed the commandments of the Lord, the people could see his shining face. Only after he finished speaking with the people did he put a veil over his face.

Now, whenever Moses speaks with the Lord, not on the mountain but evidently in his personal tent of meeting, he removes his veil. Whenever he comes out to speak the commandments that he has received from the Lord, he does so without a veil.

The people, while listening to Moses, could see that his face was shining, just like it was when he came down from the mountain. Then Moses, after conveying the commandments of the Lord, would replace the veil, "until he went in to speak with him."

Whenever Moses speaks with the Lord, he does so without a veil. Whenever he speaks to the people, he does so without a veil. The rest of the time he wears a veil. Why does Moses wear a veil outside the tent when he's not speaking the commandments of the Lord?

Clearly, Moses wasn't trying to deceive anyone; the people could see his face every time he spoke with them as the mediator of the covenant. Neither is there any suggestion that when Moses emerged from his time with the Lord that his face was more radiant, as if he needed fresh doses of the Lord to restore the sheen.

The best explanation for Moses' use of the veil, based on the context of Exodus, is that he was protecting the people. Moses knew the dangers. When he asked the Lord, "Please show me your glory," the Lord granted him a partial view and added, "But you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Exodus 33:17-23). Moses protected the people by only allowing limited exposure to reflected glory. Moses was only allowed a glimpse of God's glory on the mountain; so he only allows the people glimpses of God's glory—and reflected glory at that—down below.

The apostle Paul, however, takes a different approach.

## Not like Moses

**2 Corinthians 3:7-13:**

**Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? 9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. 10 Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of**

**the glory that surpasses it. 11 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, 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 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul is contrasting the old covenant, which came through Moses, and the new covenant, which came through Christ. The old covenant came with the glory of God, evident in Moses' face, but right from the start, the glory was "being brought to an end." The old covenant was temporary, destined to be succeeded by the new covenant, which is permanent. The old covenant was a temporary bridge to the new covenant.

Even so, the Israelites could not "gaze at Moses' face," which reflected the glory of God. They could not do so because Moses put a veil over it most of the time, when he wasn't conveying to the people the commandments of God.

Moses could not be "very bold," like the ministers of the new covenant. In the old covenant, because of sin, the people could only see the reflected glory of God on the face of Moses—and only in limited doses.

## Unveiled face

The new covenant, which comes through Christ and features the ministry of the Holy Spirit, changes all that. Thus, Paul says, "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" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Because of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, everyone, not just Moses, can behold the glory of God. As we behold the glory of God, we are "being transformed into the same image"—that is, the image of what we are beholding, which is the glory of the Lord.

We are being transformed not from "one degree of glory to another" but literally "from glory into glory"—from the glory that we behold (the glory of God) into the glory that we're becoming (reflecting the glory of God). This comes from the Spirit, who enables us to behold the glory of the Lord and effects our transformation as we behold the glory of the Lord.

Where do we behold the glory of the Lord? Paul answers this question in 2 Corinthians 4:6: "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." Paul and other ministers of the new covenant give the knowledge of the glory of God. And the knowledge of the glory of God is seen in the "the face of Jesus Christ." The writer of Hebrews says that Christ is "the radiance of the glory of God" (Hebrews 1:3).

## What you attend to

A simple spiritual law is that you become like what you worship. Or, as Paco Lopez, our high school pastor, says, "If you spend a lot of time in coffee houses, you'll smell like coffee." The psalmist says this of those who make idols and worship idols: "Those who make them become like them; / so do all who trust in them" (Psalm 115:8). Conversely, if you worship God, you become like him; you increasingly value what he values, and your character increasingly reflects his character.

Who—or what—are you worshipping?

Diplomat John Bell and journalist John Zada write:

*We become what we attend to—nothing more, nothing less. A steady and exclusive stream of reality TV, entertainment gossip, social media chatter, and "breaking news" about the latest celebrity scandal or Trump's most recent tweets—all endlessly cycling into each other—turns us into the bland clickbait of the attention harvesters. Yet, though we justifiably consider the enslavement of bodies a terrible wrong, we willingly surrender our minds for the profit of others. This new, almost hip, kind of slavery is sought, not fought.<sup>1</sup>*

What, or who, are we attending to? Are we attending to—and becoming—as bland as clickbait? If, on the other hand, you attend to Christ, and gaze upon the glory of the Lord in his face, you increasingly become conformed to his image for the sake of others, because, after all, Christ came not to be served but to serve (Romans 8:29, Mark 10:45).

Because this is usually a gradual process, you may be unaware of what is happening to you day to day, as Moses was unaware that his face was shining. Other people, however, may let you know, just as the people reacted to Moses' new skin condition.

## Embrace the gospel

If Paul gives the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, how does he do so? How does he expect those who hear him to see the face of Christ? Surely, he can't mean that he does something so that people can literally see the face of Jesus. In fact, neither in the book of Acts nor in any of his letters does he describe any aspect of Jesus' appearance.

Moreover, we know next to nothing about the face of Jesus from the Scriptures. Isaiah tells us what Jesus *didn't* look like: "he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, / and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, in an echo of Moses' experience on the mountain, his "face shone like the sun" (Matthew 17:2). When John sees a vision of Jesus, "[h]is eyes were like a flame of fire" (Revelation 1:14). That's about it.

We're left to conclude that Paul presents the face of Jesus, in a figurative way, by preaching the gospel, and we behold the face of Christ as we believe and value and savor the gospel—that is, the good news of God's victory over evil in Jesus Christ, which features the forgiveness of sins (2 Corinthians 3:16, 4:4-5).

## Look in the face of Jesus

Read the gospels, which paint a portrait of Christ, so to speak. And, because Paul says that our hearts have eyes, use your imagination (Ephesians 1:18).

At two points, the gospel writers describe not Jesus' face per se but what was on his face—or, in one case, what must have been on his face. When Jesus was dragged before the members of the Sanhedrin, some of them "spit in his face" (Matthew 26:67). And if the Roman soldiers placed a crown of thorns on his head, then blood must have been dripping down his face (Matthew 27:29).

We know that spit covered his face, and we conclude that blood dripped down his face. Therefore, use your imagination: behold the face of Christ, covered with spit and dripping with blood.

The song that my youth group sang, "Have You Seen Jesus My Lord?" includes this verse:

Have you ever stood at the cross  
With a man hanging in pain?  
Seen the look of love in his eyes?  
Then I say, my friend, you've seen Jesus my Lord.

Behold the face of Jesus, covered in spit and dripping with blood, and see the look of love in his eyes.

See from his head, his hands, his feet  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

## A glimpse of Christ

During our PBC DNA series in 2018, I preached on the 2 Corinthians verses highlighted in this sermon, and when I did, I relayed a story from Larry Crabb, a widely known counselor and writer. It's a good story, relevant here, so I tell it again.

A man approached Crabb after he had preached at a conference, put both hands on his shoulders, and said this:

*"Dr. Crabb, I am eighty-four years old. Five years ago my wife died after fifty-one years of a good marriage. I cannot express the pain that I feel every morning as I drink my coffee at the kitchen table alone. I have begged God to relieve the terrible loneliness that I feel. He has not answered my prayer. The ache in my heart has not gone away. But . . ." and here the gentleman paused and looked past me as he continued ". . . God has given me something far better than relief of my pain. Dr. Crabb, he has given me a glimpse of Christ. And it's worth it all. Whenever you preach, make much of Christ!"<sup>2</sup>*

Look in the faces of your brothers and sisters

If we can use our imaginations to see "the look of love in his eyes," how else might we behold the face of Jesus? Is there a way that doesn't require us to use our imaginations? Indeed there is.

We as followers of Christ are the body of Christ—his hands, his feet, and, yes, his face (1 Corinthians 12:27). Therefore, we can behold the face of Christ in the faces of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Another verse of the song I sang as a teenager goes like this:

Have you ever stood in the family  
With the Lord there in your midst?  
Seen the look of Christ on your brother?  
Then I say, my friend, you've seen Jesus my Lord.

Many years ago, I attended a retreat during which those of us present shared our stories with each other. It was the first time I had ever told my story, both the



joyous chapters and the sorrowful chapters, to a group of people.

When I finished, I was emotionally drained. I stood up, but my head was bowed, and I was staring at the floor in a bit of a daze. I hadn't noticed that a man who was seated on the other side of the room had stood up and was walking toward me. Finally, I noticed his feet (I was staring at the floor), and when I looked up, I saw his face, only inches away from mine.

(Many of you will remember the "Seinfeld" clip that Paul Taylor showed a few weeks back that featured "the close talker" who would get right in the faces of the people he was talking to. It was like that but with some important differences.)

He was looked into my eyes. His eyes were red and moist, and tears were crawling down his face. He didn't say a word. It was obvious that difficult parts of my story affected him deeply.

Eventually, one of us broke the silence; I can't remember which. I'm sure we talked about what I had just shared, but I have no memory of the conversation. I'll never forget the look in his eyes, though. He didn't need to speak; his face said everything.

I saw look of Christ on my brother.

## The light giver

As we select biblical texts to preach here on Sunday mornings, we try to give you a well-rounded diet from both testaments and from different genre. We try not to go too long, however, without doing something from the gospels. Moreover, even when we teach from the Hebrew Scriptures, we will often end up in some New Testament text that says something about Jesus. You may have noticed this pattern as we have preached from the book of Exodus. It's all about Jesus, isn't it?

Jesus told his opponents, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me . . ." (John 5:39). We search the Scriptures looking for Jesus. And when we find him, we preach him into the church. We can't heal; Jesus can. We make much of Christ so that we might all get a glimpse of Christ, because a glimpse of Christ is worth it all.

Early on as a pastor, during one of my annual personal retreats, the room that I was assigned in the

retreat house included a painting of Jesus that labeled him as "The light giver." Throughout the retreat, from beginning, to end, I realized that I was particularly impacted by light—the sun peeking through the fog, the dew-covered leaves reflecting the sunlight, the rising mist making the rays of the sun visible, the vapor of my breath being captured by the morning sun.

Just before leaving the retreat house, these words formed in my mind: "Scott, you too are a light giver." Were the words from God? It seemed rather presumptuous to think of myself as a light giver after staring at painting that proclaimed Jesus to be the light giver.

The next day, back home, I began reviewing 2 Corinthians for a class that I would be teaching. I came upon 2 Corinthians 4:6: "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."

I realized that I had already been doing what Paul and the other new covenant ministers were doing—teaching the Scriptures, whether from the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Testament—in such a way that reveals Christ. I now sensed the Lord telling me, in so many words, "That's exactly what I want you to do." Indeed, I too am a light giver, and so are all servants of the new covenant. So, I teach the Scriptures to reveal Christ.

## We wish to see Jesus

In the old covenant, the Lord had to conceal part of himself even from Moses. In the new covenant, we get more of the Lord. He reveals more of himself. As the Spirit enables us to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ, we are being transformed.

Still, there's more to come. Even now, in the new covenant, even after the coming of Christ and the Spirit, "we see in a mirror dimly." Later, however, when Christ returns, we will see "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Listen to the apostle John: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). When we see Christ at that time and in that way, our transformation into his image will be complete.

Until then, if you want to be more like Jesus, take a look; open your eyes. Use your imagination to behold the face of Christ, and look for his face in the faces of your brothers and sisters.

It all comes down to this.

At one point, some Greeks who were attracted to the God of Israel and the Jewish festivals that celebrated his deeds of the past and promises for the future, approached Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12:21).

Yes, we wish to see Jesus.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus / Look full in his wonderful face /

## Endnotes

1. John Bell and John Zada, "The Great Attention Heist," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 1, 2018 ([lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-great-attention-heist/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-great-attention-heist/)). They were reviewing the book *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads* by Tim Wu (New York: Knopf, 2016).
2. Larry Crabb, *The Silence of Adam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 169.