

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2  
Unfading Glory  
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Recently, my wife Amy and I began a new routine. Each afternoon at 4:30, we walk the track together down at the YMCA. It's cold outside and with little ones, being outdoors isn't really an option. As we walk, we ask one another questions, not terribly weighty or philosophical questions—just innocuous, entertaining questions that help the laps go a little quicker. Questions like: if you could drive any car what would it be? If you could go anywhere in the world at any time in history where would you go?

Last week, she asked this one: “If you could change one thing about your physical appearance, what would it be?” Well, I'd like to be about 4 inches taller. But since I'm not 18 and haven't grown that direction in over a decade. I'd like to regain a little of the former glory.

You see, like many, as I've gotten older, this glory has begun to fade, things have begun to migrate south—as if getting old wasn't bad enough, now my body is literally making its way closer to the ground. What once was reasonably priced sport sedan (notice I didn't say high performance sports car, I'm a realist), this sport sedan has started to resemble the minivan that carries the Cornell Clan nowadays. Well, not if I have anything to say about it.

So, if you're curious what your pastor is doing at about 6am most weekday mornings, he's down at the Y, attempting to slow the de-glorification process.

We live in a society that is utterly consumed with glory preservation. That may take different shapes, it may be a moment in time when our job was especially rewarding, or when our family was particularly happy, or when we felt particularly close to God (after a week of summer camp). We are obsessed with stopping, even rolling back time.

For me, one of those moments was the commencement ceremony for Amy's Graduation from Princeton Theological Seminary. Thousands of people packed into the jaw-droppingly beautiful, gothic chapel on the campus of Princeton University, and with the organ stops pulled out, and the mass of humanity standing shoulder to shoulder, belting out the words to “All Creatures of Our God and King,” from the bottom of our guts was one of the most holy and sacred moments of my life. If a small part of heaven didn't descend that day, I am convinced that the Holy Spirit yanked us up to the very gates of splendor so that God Almighty could give us His undivided attention.

We all have moments when “glory” is most visible and real—and it's only natural that we would want to stay right there and hang on to it forever.

This morning in our reading, Paul recounts one of the most vivid and infamous moments in the Gospel. It's what the Scriptures call Jesus' encounter on the Mountain of Transfiguration. Jesus brings Peter, James, and John up a hill, and there he is joined by Moses and Elijah—all three of them radiant with the glory of God. (Think Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Chewy, seeing Obi Wan, Yoda, and his Anakin at the end of Return of the Jedi). This is as spectacular a moment as any

person could ever behold. For these disciples being in the presence of the holy threesome, the heroes of our faith, was as good as it could get.

Of course, the disciples wanted to stay in this moment. Who wouldn't? But I want to suggest that the glory to which they were drawn was not that of Jesus. His was unknown to them, or *under*known. No, what they were drawn to was a lesser glory, the fading glory of Moses. This is the glory that we comprehend, this is the glory that makes sense to us.

Let me tell you what I mean by this. Paul begins this passage by saying **we have hope, though 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.**

Moses' glory is God choosing Israel and making a covenant with them. That covenant said, you keep my commands, and follow my rules, I'll be your God—my presence will be with you. And it literally was in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat where God resided with Israel.

Exodus 34 tells how Moses went up Mt. Sinai, received the Ten Commandments, and while he was in the presence of God, Moses was awash in splendor and glory. The presence of God was more brilliant and palpable than anyone had ever encountered. Moses saw God...sort of. What he got was a peek at God's backside, because that was all anyone could handle. Exodus 33 says "**no one can see God and live.**"

God only gave his people a tiny, fleeting glimpse at the full picture. And every time Moses went down to speak to the people, he put a veil over his face to preserve that fading experience of glory.

You know what this means, I know what this means. We desperately try to preserve the past, a moment in time, and experience, or the way things were, because we think this is God's best for us. We do this not because we're seeking too much from life, but because we're seeking too little; not because our dreams of God's plan for us are too big, but because they fit neatly into our best guesses. CS Lewis has a famous quote that reads: "Like an ignorant child, we want to go on making mud pies in the slum because we cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea." One of the most difficult things to bear in considering Moses' glowing face is the fact that that glory was in the process of fading—it was more like a holy sunburn. Moses' glory was reflected glory. In time, it would fade.

As great as it was to have the law confirm God's decision to choose Israel to be his holy people, it was not the end of the line for them—it wasn't God's best. As Paul says here, the glory of the law is always being brought to an end. The law was never an end to itself, it was our keeper, our babysitter, until the greater glory would come.

There's something terribly heartbreaking about this, while at the same time hopeful beyond imagination. Your goodness, your lovability, your value in this world has nothing to do with what you do. In fact, Isaiah says that **our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf.** In our best moments, in our most spiritually strong and dedicated days, we are just like a light that is slowly being extinguished. Moses' glory at the Mount of Transfiguration is a dying one. And yet so many of us still look to what we can do to keep God's favor, how we can work to present

ourselves as deserving to God, how we can capture a moment like Moses, to show it to God, see how good I am. Mud pies.

Jesus comes to take the veil away and shine on you with all his Transfigured glory and you will see as you need to see.

And what you will see is the glorious freedom of grace, the wonderful freedom of knowing that you are now a child of the heavenly Father and no one and no thing can remove you from his loving grasp and embrace. Better yet—and now Paul is really on a roll—far from being put off by the glory we see on Christ Jesus—far from having to then turn back to our own sorry reflections in the mirror only to be reminded how far short we fall of the glory of God in our own lives—the glory of Christ is contagious! WE start to glow! WE start to be transformed more and more into what CHRIST looks like.

This is what it means to go from one degree of glory to another. You are made in the image of the Father, you have glory already within you because of who you are. But when you stand in the presence of Jesus the Savior, who emanates Glory, who is the *source* of glory, and not a reflector of it, we go from one degree of glory to the next.

The rule in Jesus' day was simple: touch a leper, touch a dead body, touch anyone deemed "unclean," and YOU become unclean. But not with Jesus. The contagion of holiness and healing was so powerful that when Jesus touched the unclean, they got infected with his glory, with his life. They became clean and Jesus stayed clean. Being associated with Christ means that his life is your life, his glory bit by bit becomes your glory.

One of my favorite movies of the last 20 years is a film called the *Green Mile*. In it, John Coffey is a man falsely convicted of murder. But John Coffey seems to be a special agent of God, possessed with divine powers of healing and with a kind of "second sight" that allows him to see into people's souls to learn the truth about them. At one point in the movie, Coffey revives (resurrects!) a fellow prisoner's pet mouse after a cruel prison guard on Death Row had smashed the little critter to death.

When the movie ends, we flash forward about 70 some years only to discover at the end that the mouse, Mr. Jingles, is still alive and so—now well into his 100s—is Paul. In explaining to a friend why Mr. Jingles and he now have such extraordinary long life, the long-since retired Paul Edgecomb suspects that when someone with as much divine life in him as John Coffey had touches you and heals you, sparks of that divine life get into you (even if you're a mouse!).

When you embrace Christ as the Lord of all, you are flooded with goodness and light and life and glory. His life flows into us and not just a little and not just temporarily but for all eternity as we transform from glory to glory until finally we by grace attain the full stature of Christ Jesus the Lord. Until everything that God has done from the beginning—including the place that the Law occupies in our lives—all falls into place. It all makes sense. No more veils. No more confusion. All that remains is . . . pure, unfading, inextinguishable glory!