

Last Sunday after the Epiphany; The Transfiguration of our Lord; February 27, 2022

Exodus 34:29-35

“Find Lasting Glory in Jesus’ Gospel”

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 realize that the skin of his face was shining because he had been speaking with the LORD. When Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, they were amazed that the skin of his face was shining, so they were afraid to come close to him. Moses called to them, so Aaron and all the rulers of the community returned to him, and Moses spoke to them. Afterward, all the people of Israel came close to him, and he gave them all of the commands that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. When Moses was finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off until he came out again. Then he would come out and tell the people of Israel what had been commanded. Whenever the people of Israel saw Moses’ face, they would see the skin of Moses’ face was shining. Then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with the LORD again.

Glory fades away. The Super Bowl was two weeks ago. In the run-up to the Super Bowl, you hear an awful lot about glory. This year’s winner will go down in history and be remembered. But even the glory of a professional football championship fades – and pretty fast, too. If you pulled aside a die-hard football fan and asked him or her to name the Super Bowl Champions from just five or ten years ago, they’d probably struggle to remember.

But it’s not just true for sports. You hear the same sort of thing on the Red Carpet before the Oscars. “Who will win this year’s Best Picture or Best Actor? They’ll get glory and fame forever!” But if anyone here could name the winner of Best Picture from just two years ago, I’d be amazed.

People look for glory in all kinds of places. And some find it. But it doesn’t last forever. And, usually, it doesn’t last very long at all. To find glory that really and truly lasts, you have to look in the right place.

I want to tell you the story of people who have glory they think will last. There are over two million Israelites gathering around Mt. Sinai. Just over a year earlier, these people escaped slavery in Egypt, and now they are on the long road to the homeland God is promising them. But first, they have this important stop to make at Mt. Sinai. While the millions of Israelites wait at the bottom of the mountain, their leader, Moses, climbs to the top. And while he is up there, Moses speaks to the Lord, and the Lord speaks to him. God gives Moses his law and has Moses write it down. Rules, rules, rules. That’s what God gives Moses up on Sinai: rules, rules, rules – the Law of God. Some of those rules are only for Israelites back then, and some of the rules are for everyone in the world, including us; that part of God’s Law we call the Ten Commandments.

So when Moses comes marching down – he was over 80 years old so probably more like shuffling – when he comes back down Sinai, he is holding in his hands the rules of God, God’s Law, including God’s rules for you and me, the Ten Commandments. He has the Law of God in his hand. And to teach the Israelites that this Law is truly something glorious, God has the face of Moses shine so brightly that the Israelites

are scared to look at him. It isn't until after Moses reads the rules of God's Law to the Israelites that he puts a veil over his face to hide the glory.

Yes, the Law of God that Moses carries down Mt. Sinai is glorious – and it still is. Those Ten Commandments that still apply to us are a glorious law, because they are the Word of God and they are his will for our lives. They really are glorious, because when we Christians follow that law, when we follow those commands, we please our Heavenly Father, glorify him, and thank him for his goodness to us. That law is a glorious thing, because it teaches how to live this life according to God's plan and purpose. It is no wonder that Moses' face is beaming bright when he came down Sinai, for he is holding the glorious law of God – a bright, beaming thing.

But there is a problem. In 2 Corinthians, St. Paul tells us another reason that Moses veils his bright face. It isn't just to keep the Israelites from being afraid. It's also so they won't see the glory fading away. Like Super Bowl victories and Oscar awards, the glory shining off of Moses' face, the glory that came from God's rules and commandments, is fading away. This glory of the Law does not last.

And just why not? If God's law is such a glorious thing, why does the glory fade away? Well, there's a problem. You see, God's law is a two-sided contract, or a "covenant," as the Bible calls it. In his law, God not only tells people what to do, he also tells them this: If you do it right, if you do it perfectly, if you keep my commands without fail, then I will bless your life on this earth. And not only that, I will give you glory of heaven. Do you see the two sides to the agreement? If we keep God's commandments perfectly, he will bless us and take us to heaven. It's a two-sided deal.

The problem is, no human being has kept God's commands perfectly, and no human being can, either. The people of Israel certainly didn't keep the Ten Commandments, or the special laws God gave just for them. And not a single one of us has kept the Ten Commandments perfectly, either. In his law, God promises glory in this life and the next to anyone who keeps his commands perfectly. But that way getting glory does not work. That two-sided agreement just doesn't work, because we cannot and have not kept up our end of the deal.

Because we are sinful people, we cannot find lasting glory in the rules and laws of God. In the darkness of our sin, the glory of the law quickly fades away, and in its place comes fear. Because in his law, God also threatens death – physical and spiritual – to anyone who does not keep his commands perfectly. So the glory not only fades away, it fades into the threat of eternal damnation.

God's law is a glorious thing. But we cannot find lasting glory there, because as sinful people we cannot keep up our end of the deal perfectly. This is why the Bible refers to God's law as the "Old Covenant." It uses the word "old" in the sense of inferior. God's law is an inferior source of glory for us. The glory fades in the darkness of our sin.

And yet, Christians do, at least occasionally, stubbornly try to find their glory in God's law. No matter how many times a Christian hears that we have not, that we cannot keep God's law perfectly; no matter how many times a Christian hears that you can't find eternal glory in the law, there is still a part of us that ignores those truths. There is always a part of us that wants to think we can keep God's commands well

enough to find glory that will last forever. We like to think that we've done a fair job keeping God's rules, and because we have he should give us happy, easy lives in this world, and eternal life in the next.

But remember that God is the one who makes the terms in his deals. And when God drew up the Old Covenant of his law, he told us that our end of the deal was perfection. Unless you can claim perfection – and you can't – the glory of the Law has faded for you. You need to find your lasting glory – eternal glory – somewhere else. You need a New Covenant, a new deal, that does not depend on your sinful self doing anything. You need a Covenant where the only responsibility lies with God and what he does. There you find glory that does not fade away, glory that lasts forever.

If that phrase, "New Covenant" sounds familiar to you – and hopefully it does – you probably recognize it from the Words of Institution spoken before we celebrate the Lord's Supper. There before the altar we remember the words our Savior speaks the night before he dies: "This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."

The New Covenant, the Better Covenant, the one where we find glory that lasts forever, is in the blood of our Savior Jesus. The New Covenant is the perfect life he lived. It is the death he died to wash our sins away in his blood. It is the promise of forgiveness for all of our sins, for our breaking of God's holy law. The New Covenant is the gospel, the good news of sins forgiven in the blood of Jesus. And unlike the Old Covenant, this deal does not depend on you at all. It all depends on our Savior Jesus. It is a one-sided deal, and he does all the work.

Today we hear of our Savior Jesus on another mountain, where he shows his glory to his disciples. Jesus does this to show them, to show us, where to find real glory, lasting glory, eternal glory that never fades away. Jesus marches down that mountain to fulfill God's plan for the New Covenant. He heads into the hands of his enemies to bleed the blood of the New Covenant, which gives eternal glory to all who trust in him. It's all his plan; it's all his work; it requires no work on our part. It is the better deal, the New Covenant, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' blood. And all who trust in him find glory there.

In the New Covenant of Jesus' gospel you find real glory for this life. This glory does not fade over time like championships or awards. In fact, it doesn't fade even in life's darkest moments. No matter how wrong your life is going, no matter backward things seem, no matter how hard your wheels are spinning, you have the promise of eternal glory. And so no matter what happens to you, good or bad, joy or sorrow, sickness or health, you live in the glory of Jesus' gospel of sins forgiven and heaven wide open. In his gospel you find glory that runs right through every second of your life on this earth, no matter the challenges or sorrows you face.

And in his gospel you find the glory of knowing where you will be when you die. Because this New gospel Covenant does not depend at all on you, but only on the work of your Savior, you never need to doubt where you will spend eternity. You will spend it in glory, glory that lasts, glory you find only in Jesus.

And with that lasting glory in your heart, you can now return to God's rules and commandments with a totally new perspective. That Old two-sided Covenant is not the place to find glory for yourself. But it is the place for you to give glory to God. Once you find eternal glory in the gospel of Jesus, you will glorify

God by keeping his law. We should never think we can keep God's commandments perfectly and find our glory there. That just can't work. But do realize that when you keep those commandments you are glorifying God. You are giving him glory whenever you live, think, and speak the way he wants you to.

We find our eternal glory in one place, in our Savior, who in this coming season of Lent seals the New Covenant with his blood. That New Covenant, that better deal, is all God's grace in Christ. It's where you find lasting glory. Amen.