

Luke 9:28-36 and 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

The story of the Transfiguration, which appears in three of the Gospels, all but John, has a lot of parallels to the story of Moses going up onto Mount Sinai after the Exodus. The number of people, the number of days, the cloud of God's glory, and just the experience of a divine encounter on a mountaintop are all reminiscent of Moses. Now, Paul doesn't mention the Transfiguration outright in his letter to the Corinthians, but I think it's pretty obvious he is making a comparison. He is comparing the glory of Jesus and the New Covenant with the glory of God reflected on the face of Moses.

That story is found in Exodus 34. I'll read some of it now: "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai carrying the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, he wasn't aware that his face had become radiant because he had spoken to the Lord. So when Aaron and the people of Israel saw the radiance of Moses' face, they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called out to them and asked Aaron and all the leaders of the community to come over, and he talked with them. Then all the people of Israel approached him, and Moses gave them all the instructions the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking with them, he covered his face with a veil. But whenever he went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord, he would remove the veil until he came out again. Then he would give the people whatever instructions the Lord had given him, and the people of Israel would see the radiant glow of his face. So he would put the veil over his face until he returned to speak with the Lord."

If we are spending time with God, there should be a radiance to us, as well. People should see a change in our lives and character because of the time we have spent with God.

Now the Bible says that Moses covered his face when he came from being with God because of this glory reflected in him. In Hebrew tradition, which often adds more to the story, they said they he covered his face so that people wouldn't see this radiance fading over time.

Paul interprets that tradition as a sign that the New Covenant is greater than the Old Covenant. That glory was fading and temporary, but the glory of the New Covenant continues.

Moses was an enormous figure in Hebrew thought, but gospel, the message of the New Covenant is greater. And even the Old Testament prophets foretold that there would one day be a New Covenant, and that it would be greater. When Paul talks about the New Covenant here, he uses the Greek word KAINOS. Greek had two words for

“new.” One meant new in terms of time, but the other meant new in terms of quality. “New and improved,” to borrow a phrase from advertising. And the prophets acknowledged this. The prophet Jeremiah described the New Covenant saying, “The day is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the Lord. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

The Old Covenant was a written law. And a written law is always external to us. We can obey it and yet at the same time despise it. Human nature is rebellious. We are unable to keep a written Law. That’s why Paul describes the Old Covenant as bringing condemnation and leading to death.

But the New Covenant is better because it brings a change of heart. We don’t need better laws; we need an internal change by the power of God. We need God to work in us in a way that we are not able to accomplish ourselves.

And if the Old Covenant, temporary and imperfect as it was, came with glory such that people couldn’t bear to look at Moses’ face after he spent time with God, then how much more glorious is the New Covenant. It brings a persisting glory to those who know and love Christ. This is a classic Hebrew argument of the first century called a QAL VAHOMER argument. QAL VAHOMER meant, “How much more.” If the Old Covenant was glorious, how much more is the New! Its glory lasts forever and doesn’t fade.

We live in a throwaway society. We are very used to the idea that things don’t last. We buy something and it breaks in a couple years, so we get a new one. We buy clothes. A few years later they are out of style, so we buy new ones. But the gospel is not a throwaway message. It doesn’t wear out or go out of style. It endures forever. Of all people, we should appreciate things that last!

“So we can be very bold.” Bold doesn’t mean proud. It means confident. We are confident in God’s love for us. He demonstrated it for us in Jesus Christ. We don’t have to live with the question mark of, “Have I kept the Law well enough for God to love me?” The glory of God doesn’t fade in our lives.

“To this day, when the Law is read, a veil covers their minds so they can’t understand the truth.” The truth is that the Old Covenant points to the New. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant, the sacrificial system, and the promises of the prophets. But some were unable to receive that. They were so attached to the old

ways that they wouldn't see that God was doing a new and better thing. The veil is removed when anyone turns to Christ, though.

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom." Freedom is not doing whatever we want. Or at least that's not the best definition of freedom. Freedom is being who we are meant to be. Sin is a slave master. Until we are set free from the power of sin, we are not free. But being set free from sin, we can be who we are meant to be.

We are made in the image of God. We are created to reflect his character and goodness to the world. The gospel is a reclamation project. God is restoring us in Christ to who we are meant to be.

Over the years I've seen a few of these "restoration shows" that are popular on TV right now. A person or group of people set out to restore something, usually a house or a car, back to the character and likeness it had in its golden days. And there is something very satisfying about seeing that transformation. God is doing that in us through Jesus Christ. He is restoring our character and likeness to be like his own.

Then we can be mirrors that reflect the glory of God. The city of Corinth was well known in the first century for its bronze, and most mirrors were made of bronze at that time. Paul knows how to speak to his audience and use things that meant a lot to them.

God's glory can't normally be seen directly. We're unlikely to have another Mount of Transfiguration experience in our lives. But God's glory can be seen reflected. When we act in keeping with the character of God, his glory is reflected in us.

Someone once pointed out that we become more like that at which we gaze intently. As Christians, one of our responsibilities is to gaze so intently at Christ that we become like him. He is the exact likeness of God, the exact representation of God's essence and character. So if we gaze intently at Christ, then we become more of that which we were created to be.