

*Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church / March 13, 2022 / Pastor Jeff Harrison*  
2 Corinthians 1-4: Jesus' Glorious New Way  
**Being Transformed** (2 Corinthians 3:18 - 4:6)

### **A butterfly garden introduces concept of transformation**

Good morning! Let's pray...

Back at the beginning of covid, as we're stuck at home, running out of activities to do with our kids, there's a knock on our door. A neighbor, like an angel sent from God, has brought over some live baby caterpillars to give us, a new activity to help us not go completely stir crazy. ☺

Our kids had previously received a butterfly garden as a gift, so we have experience helping caterpillars turn into butterflies. And we still have all the stuff from the butterfly garden, *[show 1<sup>st</sup> pic]* pictured here. So we feed the caterpillars, and then over time they form a few chrysalides on the logs in the mesh habitat.

Then we wait. It doesn't look like any transformation is taking place inside the chrysalides, but a few weeks later, a black swallowtail butterfly appears. *[2<sup>nd</sup> pic]*. Before flying away, it spends some time with Kate, as you can see on Kate's wrist in the picture.

Then another week later a second black swallowtail appears. Here's a brief video of that second butterfly... *[video]*

That second butterfly stays with Kate for 10 minutes before flying away. A fun moment of grace early in covid and a reminder that even in hardship, God is still working transformation in the world.

### **Relevance: We want to be transformed and help others be transformed**

These last few weeks we've been talking about another kind of transformation God is working in our world. The transformation that God brings through the New Covenant.

If we're being honest, we all have unhealthy areas needing God's transformation, broken places where we are not a beautiful butterfly. So God works through the New Covenant to bring transformation in our lives. Transformation not only for our sake, but also for others.

For we all want to make a difference, to serve in a way that really blesses people. Service that impacts friends and family and church family, and fellow students, co-workers, neighbors. Service that helps those we care about to transform.

### **Orienting to God's Word – Summary of Old Covenant & transforming New Covenant**

The apostle Paul, a significant leader in the early church, writes about our transformation and other's transformation in the New Testament letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. So if you've got a Bible or Bible app, open to 2 Corinthians, chapter 3. Or you can follow along with the verses on the screen. If you're new to the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

The last two Sundays we've been talking about an Old and a New Covenant. Because of everyone's need for transformation, God created the Old Covenant.

This took place about 1,500 years before Jesus' earthly ministry, as God freed Moses and the Israelite people from slavery in Egypt. By grace, God chose the Israelite people as His special people to represent Him to the world, and gave the Israelites His Law.

At Mount Sinai, a covenant, a sacred commitment, was made between God and His people chosen by grace, what we call the Old Covenant. It was a relational arrangement with mutual obligations, where the Israelites covenanted, or committed, to obey God's Law and represent God to the other peoples of the world.

If Israel obeyed the covenant, God covenanted to provide abundant blessings, while disobedience would lead to discipline for His people. The Old Covenant and its Law had a glory to it, good things given by a good God.

But if you read the Old Testament, most of the time the Israelites were breaking the covenant they made with God. God's Law did not establish lasting transformation among the Israelites.

So later in the Old Testament, God's messengers like Jeremiah and Ezekiel began to speak about God making a New Covenant to replace the Old. The last two Sundays we've seen that under the New Covenant, which Jesus inaugurated through His death and resurrection, that Jesus is triumphal, victorious over sin and death.

We've seen that under the New Covenant, God's Law is written on people's hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit, empowering us to obey it and to serve others. So our confidence and competence in serving do not need to decrease when we feel incapable, weak, or overwhelmed amid our difficulties. Because it's not about us, it's about what comes from God as He works transformation in us and through us to others.

We've seen that the New Covenant is a way of transforming freedom. Freedom in knowing that your sins are forgiven not because of what you have done, but because Jesus did everything for you. Freedom as God's Spirit grows us into people who are boldly open, relating genuinely, free to share about Jesus and about ourselves, even our weaknesses, as God works through us to transform others.

### **Teaching: God brings transformation through the New Covenant**

*Transforms us as we contemplate Jesus (3:18, 4:6)* – So God brings transformation through the New Covenant. But how did Paul himself experience so much of this transformation and how did Paul suggest his churches be transformed? And how do we serve in a way where God works through us to transform others?

Let's explore these questions as we read, starting with our last verse from last Sunday. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 3, verse 18. **(3:18 - 4:6)**

<sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Back in verse 18, we're invited to approach God with unveiled faces, no concealing, as we contemplate His glory. But how can we approach a holy God when we're so messed up? It's thanks to Jesus, Who inaugurated the New Covenant by dying for our sins and rising from the dead. Because Jesus has taken our sin and gifted us with His righteousness, we can never lose the love of God, no matter what; we are in Christ.

So we are free to approach God with confidence, not concealing anything, even with our sin, because of what Jesus has done. God's Spirit helps us to reveal ourselves to God and to contemplate His glory.

But what exactly is God's revealed glory that we are to contemplate as verse 18 says? Verses 4 and 6 of chapter 4 resume this theme of glory.

Verse 4 shows that when a person trusts in Jesus, God's Spirit removes the blinders from their mind so that they see the truth of the gospel. The gospel, the good news of Jesus, is no longer hidden from them. In "the light of the gospel" they behold the glory of Jesus, Who is the image of God.

So God's revealed glory that we contemplate is Jesus. As verse 6 says it, we see the light of God's glory displayed in the face of Jesus. Jesus is the image of the invisible God to us, revealing things about our heavenly Father that would otherwise remain hidden; Jesus displays God's glory to the world.

Like a kids' Sunday School class, the answer to our questions so far is "Jesus." How can we approach a holy God when we're so messed up? Jesus. Who is God's revealed glory that we are to contemplate? Jesus, in His glory.

But what does it mean to really contemplate Jesus' glory, as verse 18 says? In the Greek that 2 Corinthians was originally written in, this term "contemplate" (**κατοπτρίζω**) has been defined in this verse as to "look at something in a mirror, to contemplate something."<sup>1</sup> So some English translations, like the updated New American Standard Bible, translate "contemplate" as "looking as in a mirror".

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<sup>1</sup> *BDAG*, 535.

A while back I read a book on prayer by Pastor Tim Keller that was helpful in understanding what this mirror reference means.<sup>2</sup> It notes that when we look in a mirror, we don't directly see a person. We see a two-dimensional reflection of them. So today we can't physically see Jesus, in His ascended glory, like we will in heaven.

But we can meditate on the gospel and the Scriptures, and with eyes of faith, we can partially see the glory of Jesus in His divinity and humanity. The gospel and the Scriptures are like the mirror through which we can see a reflection of Jesus' glory today.

So rather than always looking at ourselves, thinking about how we look, how much popularity we have, how smart we are, how much we have, and so on, with eyes of faith, we can instead keep looking in the mirror at Jesus' glory.

If you're contemplating something in the mirror, that's not a quick glance and then look away. "Contemplating" describes looking at the details, pouring over, looking closely.

So to "contemplate" in verse 18 does not suggest a quick glance at Jesus' glory. Paul wants us to join him in something way more than just, "Yeah, Jesus is glorious and loves me" and then go about our day forgetting about Him.

To "contemplate" means looking at the details of Jesus' glory: gazing closely again and again. Contemplating how, despite all my doubting, questioning God's authority, and disobeying His commands, Jesus was still willing to pay any price to get you and me back to God.

Contemplating how Jesus, creator and sustainer of the entire universe, that Jesus opened His arms wide to you and me, even from a cross, so that He could take all my failures to His account and gift me with His righteousness!

Contemplating how Jesus keeps forgiving you and me over and over, never once counting my failures against me, never once withholding His love from me, while entrusting me with the glory of being His representative!

As we contemplate Jesus' glory like that again and again, God's Spirit brings transformation. Verse 18 shows that as we contemplate Jesus' glory, we are being transformed by God's Spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> Pastor Tim Keller, in his book *Prayer*, shares many of the ideas on 3:18 which follow, which he got from the Puritan John Owen.

So we don't make ourselves grow as we contemplate Jesus' glory. Rather, as we contemplate Jesus' glory, as Christian author Dallas Willard says, we put ourselves "in the pathway of grace" so that God's Spirit can change us.

So rather than always looking at ourselves, day after day, we can instead keep looking as in a mirror at Jesus' glory. And over time, we'll begin to resemble what we see in the mirror: Jesus. God's Spirit will help us become more alive to the realities of Jesus, to transform us more into Jesus' image, from one degree to another.

Now back when I was in college, my relationship with God needed transformation. Back then, I believed that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead and that I was God's child and that He loved me.

But I also believed, inconsistently, that God often looked down on me with some disgust because of my sin. And I also thought that God's commands were not for my good, that He was a bit of a kill joy with some of His rules.

But as my roommates and I went through a Christian book on relationship with God together, we began to see that our ability to come to God is always because of Jesus' faithfulness, not ours. And that God, while concerned about our sin, always looks on us with a fatherly love. And also how pursuing, obeying, and serving Jesus, though challenging, brings joy to life; that His commands are ultimately for our flourishing.

With this new, better understanding of Who God is, my roommates and I began to seek Him more. As we did, the Holy Spirit graciously worked, though none of us knew about 2 Corinthians 3:18. But by the Spirit's work, we began to see more of Jesus' glory, and experience more of the fruit of joy in our lives.

Pursuing Jesus not only because we wanted Him to answer our prayers but because we just found Jesus Himself compelling. The One with all glory, Who chose to lose His glory on the cross so that we could share in His glory.

As the Spirit worked, Jesus became more of our treasure, and to my surprise, I found myself honestly saying things like, "It's cool that I don't have a girlfriend right now, I'm content in God." Stuff that before would have seemed so cheesy and been completely fake had I said it previously.

As my roommates and I kept pursuing Jesus, gazing on His glory, our transformation also included getting more involved at church as we now wanted to serve others in a way we hadn't really before.

*Transforms our ministry serving Jesus – sustains and shapes (4:1-5)* – So our New Covenant blessings are not only for our good, but so that God can work through us to bring good in other people's lives too.

With the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we can share about Jesus and serve people. Chapter 4 has insight into that, so let's see about New Covenant ministry to others, starting in verse 1 of chapter 4. **(1-6)**

4 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Verse 1 says that it is through God's mercy that we have this ministry, so even when service is hard, we don't have to lose heart. We serve in a groundbreaking, abundantly glorious kind of ministry. One where we share in Jesus' victory and where God's Spirit works through us to accomplish His purposes and to sustain our hearts.

Verses 2-6 show how our methods and message transform under New Covenant ministry, in the power of the Spirit. We are to renounce secret and shameful ways, no unethical the "ends justify the means" kind of operating. We are instead to be honest and to keep from distorting God's Word, speaking the truth plainly.

These verses show that the god of this world, Satan, is clever, knowing how to blind people from Jesus, without them even being aware of it.

So our methods and message must not focus on ourselves. Let's have a moment of awareness here. If the apostle Paul wasn't good enough in himself to transform lives, then we dare not depend on ourselves.

We join Paul in verse 5 in saying, "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." Jesus is the One who is stronger than the god of this world, more than up to the task of transforming people's lives. So we need Him to bring the transformation.

Our role, as the end of verse 5 says, is "ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." We are not the servant of others. Rather we are Jesus' servants and therefore serve others.

We already experience the blessing of so many faithful servants here at Northwest. But imagine if everyone came every Sunday with the mindset of verse 5, "My message today is Jesus, and I'm here to serve everyone for Jesus' sake." This is what New Covenant ministry is: servanthood done for Jesus' sake, in God's power.

For God is the one, as verse 6 says, Who at the dawn of creation dispelled the darkness with light. And He is the only One who can make His light shine in people's hearts: driving back the darkness of sin and giving the light of the knowledge of His glory displayed in Jesus.

Now this idea of God's light in these verses was not some abstract concept for Paul. If you're not familiar with Paul's story in the Bible book of Acts, before following Jesus, Paul was blinded to the truth. He made murderous threats and imprisoned Jesus' followers.

But on the road to Damascus, Paul was suddenly overwhelmed with divine light, literally blinded by its glory. And Paul heard a voice, and to his amazement, it was the voice of Jesus. You could say that Paul saw the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Jesus, that Paul experienced the light of God's glory displayed in Jesus.

Paul never got over that wonderous, transforming encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road. Paul never decided, "I've seen enough of Jesus' glory. I'm good, I'm keeping the mirror focused on me now."

No, Paul kept gazing at Jesus' astounding glory, all the while being transformed more and more into Jesus' image by the Spirit. Jesus' glory filled Paul with a longing for more of Jesus and for God to bring transformation through Paul in people's lives.



## **Next Step**

This morning we've seen that God brings transformation through the New Covenant. God's Spirit transforms us as we keep gazing at Jesus' glory and transforms how we serve Jesus, sustaining our hearts and shaping our methods and message.

So our next step this morning is to keep gazing at Jesus' glory. That's how we can apply this passage to our lives, keep gazing at Jesus' glory.

As we do, in the power of the Holy Spirit, transformation will take place in us, and God will work through us to transform others. Transformation even more amazing than that from caterpillar to butterfly. Let's pray...