

Exodus 33:12-34:35 // Revelation Leads to Transformation

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[0 : 00] Cool. All right. 2 Corinthians 3, verses 7-18. Now, if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness? For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts? Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed because only in Christ is it taken away.

Even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 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.

This is the Word of the Lord. So our second reading tonight has two parts. The first part will be Exodus chapter 33, verse 12, to chapter 34, verse 7, which is found on the Church Bible, page 92.

[2 : 12] So Exodus chapter 23, beginning verse 12. Moses said to the Lord, You have been telling me, lead these people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.

You have said, I know to you by name, and you have found favor with me. If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways, so that I know you and continue to find favor with you.

Remember that this nation is your people. The Lord replied, My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.

Then Moses said to him, If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?

What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?

And the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you, and I know to you by name.

[3 : 25] Then Moses said, Now, show me your glory. And the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence.

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But, he said, You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.

Then the Lord said, There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock, and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.

Then I will remove my hand, and you will see my back. But my face must not be seen. The Lord said to Moses, Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.

Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there, on the top of the mountain. No one is to come with you, or be seen anywhere on the mountain.

[4 : 45] Not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain. So Moses trestled out two stone tablets like the first one, and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the Lord had commanded him.

And he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. Then the Lord came down in the cloud, and stood there with him, and proclaimed his name, the Lord.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children, for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation. The second part of the reading could be found in the same chapter, and we are picking up from verse 29.

So you can flip over the page to page 94. So Exodus chapter 34, beginning verse 29. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant, because he had spoken with the Lord.

[6:10] When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them.

Afterwards, all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant.

Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went to speak with the Lord. Amen. Well, friends, good evening.

Great to be with you. Real privilege to be opening up. What fantastic words we've heard from Exodus 33, 34, 2 Corinthians 3. Let's pray as we jump in.

[7:19] Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks to us, that we don't have to guess, we don't have to work out who you are, but you've given us your word. And we pray that as we come to these words tonight, that you would speak to us, and that you would mold us, that you would change us, that we might be your people.

And we pray that in Christ's name. Amen. Some of you would have heard the news recently that church is cool again.

Well, maybe that's a little bit of an overstatement, but there's been a survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the Bible Society, and it's reasonably encouraging if you're a churchgoer.

The headline is that a quiet revival is happening in the UK. If you've looked at the report, you might have seen a graph like this on the screen. And so, usually how these graphs go is that they start really, really low, like the light blue, as the younger people aren't really in church anymore, and then as you get to older and older generations, there's sort of more and more.

But now, instead of the line of the graph being that way, there's a U. Young people are coming back to church. And this is not sort of just statistical, you know, funny stuff to try and, you know, make it look good.

[8:42] It's actually a really significant shift. Amongst 18 to 24-year-olds, in 2018, 4% of the population attended church at least monthly. That's jumped to 16% in 2024.

And the driver for that is young men. Now, 18 to 34-year-olds, being the young people in church, is good news for me.

As a 34-year-old, I just squeeze in to that demographic, and so it's nice to still be a part of the young crowd. But that's a real shift. It's a really significant thing going on in the U.K.

at the moment with church. Might make us ask the question, well, why is this shift happening? And the report doesn't go into motivations. It wasn't that kind of a survey.

But it does tell a story of denominations. What type of churches are people going to? Now, bearing in mind this survey was only done in England and Wales.

[9:40] This doesn't bear any sort of direct relation to Scottish churches. It is Catholic and Pentecostal churches that have seen the most growth, especially amongst those younger populations.

So, here's a quote from the survey, from the report, among 18 to 34-year-olds, only 20% of churchgoers are Anglican, down from 30% in 2018, with 41% Catholic and 18% Pentecostal. Both of them significantly higher than 2018. That's a significant increase in the number of young people who are walking into those churches. Now, Catholic churches and Pentecostal churches

are, at one level, on sort of completely different ends of the spectrum when it comes to, like, the spiritual marketplace, if I can use as crass a term as that.

But what they have in common is a promise of experiencing God and the power to change your life. It seems like those are the things that our society is increasingly hungry for, perhaps especially younger people in our society are hungry for an experience of God and a dissatisfaction with life, recognising that it needs to change and I need some help to change it.

I've chatted with a few men in their 20s at St Silas over the last few months since I've been around and I've heard a few people tell a story of being dissatisfied with their life a couple of years back.

[11 : 14] But they knew a Christian who seemed to have their life together a little bit more or they started watching things on YouTube and they got interested and they came along to church. They wanted to experience God.

There was something there that they were missing. A few weeks ago, I met Stephen. He grew up in the Roman Catholic Church and then he went wandering in his teen and his young adult years and during COVID he felt like nobody knew what was going on in this world and so he came back to the childhood faith that he was raised in in the Catholic Church.

He wanted to experience God again. He wanted that stability and he recognised that without God his life had spiralled out of control. He wanted to see his life transformed. And so if this is the hunger for our society, perhaps even for you as you've stepped into church this evening, if that's the hunger, the real question to ask is how, has God revealed himself?

For that will inform how we experience him. And then the follow-up question, well, where does the power to change come from if our lives are to be different?

And as we open up Exodus 33 and 34, with a little help from 2 Corinthians 3, we're going to see that there's one answer to those two questions.

[12 : 38] So keep Exodus open. The big idea we're going to see in there tonight is that revelation leads to transformation. Revelation of God leads to transformation of us.

and we're going to see that as we step through. The problem, the prayer, the proclamation, and the presence that outlines in your service sheet. So let's go.

The problem, number one, we pick up Exodus 3 just after the golden calf incident. We've spent the last two weeks on Sunday nights thinking about the golden calf incident. Bad news all around in that story.

As God's people get impatient with Moses, they make a golden calf that they can worship as an image of God. Aaron helps them rather than stops them. They become like what they are worshipping.

And God steps into the situation in judgment. Off the back of that, there are slightly different problems for God's people and for Moses, the one who is leading them.

[13 : 39] The people are spiritually distressed. Hear their response to the Lord's words in Exodus 33 verses 3 and 4. This is just before our reading began but in the chapters.

So God is speaking and He says to them, go up to the land flowing with milk and honey but I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.

And when the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. God's people are spiritually distressed.

They don't know where they stand with God. They've been confronted in their sin and they don't have any way of dealing with it. Perhaps that's you as you've walked into church tonight.

Either as a complete outsider to church or maybe you've been in church your whole life but you know there's stuff in your life right now that you're convicted of.

[14 : 44] This is a good place to be. The questions of how has God revealed Himself and where is the power to change are very relevant. The problem for Moses is a slightly different one.

He is saying to God, help me do what you have asked me to do. This is where our Bible reading began in verse 12. Moses said to the Lord, you have been telling me lead these people but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.

You have said, I know you by name and you have found favour with me. Moses is saying, I understand the task God but I need your help to do it.

I feel unable to accomplish what you have set before me. And perhaps that's something that you resonate with tonight. You know what faithfulness looks like, you know what you're supposed to do but you feel like you can't do it, you feel like you're unable to live out what God has called you to do.

A former minister of mine once told me that the most common prayer that he prays as a minister of a church is four letters long. H-E-L-P.

[15 : 53] That's a good prayer. We need God's help. Maybe that's you tonight. You're crying out from a sense of not knowing how you walk forward.

Help me, God. And both of these problems are infused by the question to God, can you take us back to where we were before our sin? Can you take us back to where we were before the golden calf thing happened?

Because there Israel were hearing the instructions for what to do. They'd been saved from slavery in Egypt. They were on the route to the promised land. They'd been given instructions on how to worship. Everything was going right.

And then all of a sudden the golden calf comes in and breaks that. It smashes up their relationship with God, Jonathan showed us last week. Israel wants to go back to where they were before the calf.

But we can never go back. So what is the way forward? For them, what is the way forward for us? Second point tonight, the prayer.

[17 : 00] Well, it's two prayers really. The first thing that Moses prays for comes in verse 13 and the second one comes in verse 18. And those two prayers are, verse 13, teach me your ways so I can know you.

And verse 18, show me your glory. Teach me your ways and show me your glory. Now, prayer is always a good impulse when you are struggling, when you're not sure what the answer might be, but those are particularly insightful prayers.

They are God-centered prayers. If you think about what Moses could have prayed, or you imagine sort of putting yourself in Moses' shoes and what might you have prayed for in that situation?

God, just get us to the promised land and then we'll sort all this stuff out. Change our circumstance, just get us through this bit. Or just stop us behaving like idiots.

Now, those are good requests, they are requests in line with God's will, nothing wrong with praying those things, but they are prayers about our circumstances and about us. Moses' prayers prayers are bigger.

[18 : 20] What Moses prays are the prayers of someone who knows that the solution to any problem really at the root is knowing God more personally.

Teach me your ways and show me your glory. They are both prayers for God to reveal himself because revelation leads to transformation.

what are you praying for at the moment? What is the thing that sort of you keep coming back to in your prayer life, the thing that dominates that?

Are you stuck with a decision about a relationship maybe? You're not sure what to do. You're praying for God to make that clear. You're weighing up career options, you're praying for God to show you what to do, you're stuck in a cycle of addiction, you're praying for God to free you from it. All good prayers, but don't just pray about you and your circumstances. Pray bigger. Pray for God to reveal himself to you more fully out of a trust that that is what you actually need.

[19 : 37] God to reveal himself to his people, to Moses, and the answer comes in the form of a proclamation.

Third point for tonight. In verses 14 to 17 God says yes to Moses' first prayer. 33 verse 17, verse 19, he says yes to the second prayer.

And the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I'll have mercy, and I'll have compassion on whom I'll have compassion.

That is good news. But, it continues, God continues, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.

Now just before our Bible reading began, if you look in your Bibles at verse 11, you'll see what seems like a slightly contradictory statement. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend.

[20 : 56] And then now we hear that no one can see God's face and live. So, what's going on here? The first thing to say is that God is spirit. He's not a human, he doesn't have a physical body, he doesn't have a physical face that you could look at.

When the Old Testament has little episodes like this, where God is appearing in some physical form, whether it's here before Moses, or it is the still small voice that Elijah hears on the mountain, or other places, it's a thing called accommodation.

It just means God is making himself appear in some form, so that we, in our limited human mind, so that Moses in his limited human mind, in all the frailty that comes with humanity, that we can understand some aspect of God.

Anytime you read a passage about God's heart for his people, that is written because we are to relate to him, rightly, as a good father whose heart is melting for his wayward child.

But we don't read into our understanding of God that he's actually a 47-year-old human male who has a teenager, right? We relate to him in a certain way, as he's revealed himself, without thinking that that is physically who he is.

[22 : 21] So the point here when Moses speaks to God face to face isn't that Moses literally sees a face that he could sketch when he meets God. The point is that he knows him intimately, or more accurately to the text.

God knows Moses intimately. God knows Moses like a friend. Just as an aside, that is an unchanging aspect of God's character.

when the eternal Son of God took on flesh and stepped into our world on the very first Christmas in Bethlehem, that was the ultimate act of accommodation.

And Jesus would come to be known as the friend of sinners, because that's how God has always been. So if the point isn't that Moses sees God, well, what does he see?

God directs Moses to stand in a crack in the rock, and he will cover him with his hand. Moses will only be able to see the final trace of God as he passes by.

[23 : 37] If Moses was brought into a police station after this incident, and a police officer lined up seven people who may have passed by him on the mountain, and God was in the line-up, Moses wouldn't be able to identify him.

All he sees with his eyes on the mountain is a cloud. And that reveals something of God's glory. He is transcendent, he is beyond the limits of the material universe.

It's part of why it was such a big problem for Israel to make an image of him, whether it's a calf or anything else. Because if you create something and say that's God, it's always going to misrepresent him.

But that doesn't mean that God is unknowable. He's beyond the limits of the material universe, but he's not unknowable. You just don't get to know him by seeing a physical manifestation.

of him. You know him through how he has chosen to reveal himself, how he desires to be known. And the way that God answers Moses' two prayers is to proclaim himself to Moses using words.

[25 : 01] Exodus 34 verse 5, then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and the fourth generation. So although God is transcendent and he can't be seen, he is revealed through his actions and he's revealed through his character.

This is the God who will be with Moses as the people head towards the promised land. This is the God who will cover over the sin of his people and not destroy them for the golden calf episode, even if there's still a bit of ambiguity as to what that looks like because he doesn't let sin go unpunished. You've really got to wait until the New Testament to work out how that is reconciled. But there are at least ten times that the Old Testament quotes these verses that reveal God's character.

This revelation of God to Moses is not remembered for the cloud, it's not remembered for God's face, it's not remembered for his back, it is remembered for the insight into God's character, the words that he uses to describe himself.

[26 : 49] And the God who proclaimed himself to Moses is the same God who calls us to follow him tonight. He's not revealed through mystical experience, he is revealed through his words, his character.

And God's character means that by trusting in him, you can stand as a Christian in the midst of life's ambiguous circumstances. When you know nothing else, when you don't know the medical diagnosis, when you don't know where the next paycheck will come from, when you don't know if

you're still going to be married next week, when you don't know what tomorrow holds because your whole life has been turned upside down, when you don't know anything in this world, you can know the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

That is who our God is. And what you need tonight in Glasgow in 2025 is not the experience of looking at a cloud. You need the God who reveals himself in those words.

So we've seen the problem, the smashed up relationship with God because of the golden calf episode. We've seen the prayer, a big prayer for God to reveal himself. We've seen the proclamation that God is known through his character, and his actions.

Those things are true for Moses. They are true for us. And yet our vision of God's revelation is infinitely clearer than what Moses had.

[28 : 47] The difference comes as we think about our final point for tonight, God's presence. Jesus. If you're familiar with the Exodus story, it might feel really comfortable to think of Moses as the one who foreshadows Jesus stepping into the world, being our mediator with God.

That's true, we've seen that in the last couple of weeks. But when the New Testament picks up Exodus 34, it makes a different parallel. Israel. And this gets to the heart of the question we began with, of where do you go if you're the spiritually hungry 18 to 34 year old right now?

You want to experience God and you want your life to change, where do you go? And the answer comes as we hold Exodus 34 and 2 Corinthians 3 side by side.

2 Corinthians 3 verse 7 says, Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?

So we're anticipating that we're getting ready for something far more glorious than whatever's going on in Exodus 34 because that's what this is referring back to. Moses was bringing the law to Israel, that was his ministry.

[30 : 14] The law was good but Paul tells the Corinthians in his letter that ultimately it was a ministry that brought death. You see the law points out all the ways that God's people are unable to live up to the standard that God calls them to live by.

And so although it is provided by a God who is compassionate and gracious, it is unable to rescue people from their sin.

It only has the power to bring death and condemnation. It can't truly transform.

And so Paul calls it the ministry that brought death. See the problem with living life is rarely knowing what to do but the ability to actually live it out.

Your shopping habits are proof of this. You go to the store, you go in for bread and milk and you walk out with bread and milk and a packet of crisps and a chocolate bar. The problem with your diet is not a lack of information as to what healthy eating is, it's living it out.

[31 : 26] That's where our problem lies. We need something that can transform us. We need more than just good advice. We need more than a ministry of death.

Moses' ministry didn't have the ability to transform but even it came with glory. Let's see the glory that it brought. Exodus 34 29.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant and they were afraid to come near him. Because God is so glorious, even this ministry of death comes with glory to God's people. Through Moses' radiant face. Back to 2 Corinthians 3, verse 9. If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness.

[32 : 30] For what was glorious, this is the ministry of Moses, has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. This is the ministry of the Spirit that 2 Corinthians 3 is talking to us about.

And if it was transitory, the ministry of Moses, if what was transitory, sorry, came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts? the ministry of the Spirit.

Now we'll see that in a moment, what the ministry of the Spirit is. But the first question, why was Moses' ministry transitory? Back to Exodus 33, 34, sorry, verse 33.

When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. And whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out

and told the Israelites what he'd been commanded, then they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord. So the picture is that Moses is going in and going out of this tent where he's meeting with God. It's outside the camp. All of Israel is over here, the tent's over here, and Moses is going into the tent to meet with God and then coming out to talk to the people.

[33 : 44] And he'll go in and he'll talk with God, and as he comes back, his face is radiant because he's had an impact with God's glory. But then as he's out of the tent, as he speaks to the people that the glory fades away a little bit.

And so he puts the veil back on, and then he goes back inside the tent. That's the extent of the glory. And 2 Corinthians 3 says it's different for us now.

Verse 16, Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Whenever anyone trusts in Jesus, puts their life in his hands, acknowledges him as king, repents of their sin, the veil is taken away.

You see, the veil is not covering God's, preventing his glory from shining. No, God's glory is everywhere in the universe. The veil is on us, so that we're unable to see God's glory.

But when you turn to Jesus, all of a sudden you can see God's revelation, and that is the ministry of the Spirit. Verse 17, Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

[35 : 07] Freedom to what? Freedom from the veil, so that we can gaze upon the glory of God in the face of Jesus. And we all, verse 18, who with unveiled faces contemplates the Lord's glory, as we look at Christ, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

So, Exodus 34, the ministry of Moses, which brings death, as we gaze on the Lord through Moses, which comes with a transitory glory.

2 Corinthians 3, the ministry of the Spirit, which brings life, as we gaze on Jesus by the Spirit, which comes with ever-increasing glory.

This is the most exciting thing about having the Spirit dwell in you. More than any gifts that you are given to serve the church, more than any experience you might discern, he enables you to truly see Jesus in the pages of Scripture, to truly see God's fullest revelation to us.

And as you see Jesus, you see his character, you see his glory, you see his ways, you are transformed.

[36 : 43] Little bit by little bit, we're all frustrated with the pace of that, but that's how God has promised transformation to happen. So if you're the person who is hungry for God, experience and transformation, the power to change, don't chase experience.

Open a Bible. read the Gospel accounts of Jesus, do it with a Christian friend, come to Hope Explored in two Thursdays time, and pray for the veil to be gone, so that you can see God revealed. I want to finish with a story, there's a woman who I knew back in Australia, let's call her Deb, and Deb didn't grow up in a Christian home, she grew up and she had a really significant eye condition, she wasn't able to focus her eyes on an object together, she could only look out of one at a time, and it meant that she got bullied a lot as a kid for appearing to be slightly different to those others who she knew.

And although she wasn't a Christian, she would kneel next to her bed every night as a child and pray that God would fix her eyes. And she prayed that year after year after year.

And she got into her teenage years, there was no difference. that once a night turned to once a week, to once a month, and she gave up.

[38 : 23] She stopped praying to God. In her mid-thirties, there was a colleague of hers who invited her along to church, and she respected this colleague.

And so she came along to church, she did a course quite like Hope Explored, actually. And as she did Hope Explored, she met Jesus for the first time. She saw who he was.

She saw his beauty. She saw that he was a person unlike any other person who's ever stepped foot on this world. And she gave her life to Jesus at the age of 34.

All of a sudden, her life had meaning. All of a sudden, her life had purpose. All of a sudden, there was a joined-up way of looking at everything in this world that made sense to her. And it made all the difference in her life.

Changed the way she lived every day. And a couple of months later, Deb realized something. God had answered the prayer that she prayed every night by her bed.

[39 : 27] The eye condition wasn't gone. That was unchanged. But God had fixed her eyes. By his spirit, he had removed the veil and enabled her to gaze upon Jesus, which was so much better than what she thought she was praying for.

And she would not give up the new vision she had for eyes that looked normal. Not in a thousand years. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we are so thankful for Jesus. And we are mindful, Lord, that so often we don't look at Christ our Saviour.

We don't look to the cross to be reminded of what he's done for us. We don't look at his character, but we look at the world around us.

Lord, by your spirit, would you fix our eyes upon Jesus? And as we look at Jesus and gaze upon his face, with veils gone, would you mould us and transform us as your people, little bit by little bit, until Christ returns.

[40 : 51] We pray in his name. Amen.