

# Behold the Glory of the Lord Jesus

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Preacher: Joshua Russell

[0:00] I have been mentioning to you the connection cards that I receive over the weeks, and I want to encourage you to keep filling those in. And I thought I would bring a few along this morning.

So we probably prayed for, I don't know, 40 or 50 people across both congregations last week. There are lots of people who are writing prayer points, writing things that they're learning. It's really wonderful to read and I won't tell you any of who these people are, but someone wrote, you know, one new thing you learned? What forgiveness actually means? Cancelling a debt. And they asked for us to pray for growing more in their relationship with God. Someone wrote, one new thing you learned? A lovely picture of God's triumphal procession spreading the gospel. And asked us to pray for the salvation of someone in their family. The Corinthians are the reason Paul didn't evangelize. One thing you're reminded of, we are commanded to forgive.

[1:00] It's not just suggested or advised, we are commanded. One way you could respond, reflect on humility, compassion and thankfulness in forgiveness. And one thing we could pray for you, want to form good daily Bible reading habits.

That's a really good thing and we prayed for you this week. Someone wrote, one new thing you learned? That God is with me every minute. And how powerful forgiveness is in being a Christian. Again, lots of people praying for family members and my heart goes out to you. I know how much I've been reading Romans 9. Paul talks about how in anguish he is for his family, for the whole nation of Israel, his kin.

So that is, I would just say keep writing it on your connection card every week and I'll pray for it every week. That is a good thing to pray for and it really, yeah, it's, I'm just with you in that. And yeah, you know, someone wrote a little, I like the pictures people draw. Someone wrote a, turning down evangelistic opportunities for the sake of strengthening the church. Paul turned down evangelistic opportunity face with a shocked look on it.

[2:14] Anyway, pray that I'd be less irritable. Is that my one? No. Paul being dragged around the procession image, glorious weakness, the whiplash of gospel ministry.

One way you could respond, forgive. Anyway, they were just, I can't read you all of them. And those were all from morning church, I think. So just let me encourage you to keep doing that. And it really helps, it really helps me.

I learn and get feedback on, yeah, how we're thinking about the teaching. And also, it's great to pray for you. Okay, let me read from 2 Corinthians chapter 3. The Apostle Paul writes, Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.

Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything is coming from us. But our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant.

Not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now, if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory, that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?

[3:57] For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it.

For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 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. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.

Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now, the Lord is the Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

[5:05] This is the word of the Lord. We live in the age of the five-star rating. Do you know what I mean?

When I go shopping on Amazon, and I was just doing this this week, so that I don't lose my keys and things. Okay, I bought one of those little tags. Anyway, there's that little force, and I'm going to go to the four-star button on the left-hand side, where I can filter out all the products that fall below that rating.

And then, if I'm still not satisfied, I can sort all the products on the page by the average customer review, so that the five-star ones appear at the top. And if I have to scroll to the very bottom of the page, I know that I'm getting real junk down there, just the four-star second-rate products.

And I'm not interested in that, so we're sticking up the top. There's got to be something dodgy about something that only gets four stars. And, of course, I can use the same method if I go looking for a restaurant, or I want to catch an Uber, which I've never done, but apparently that's how you do it. I want to see those five stars. And everyone wants me to give them five stars, so that they can maintain that high rating, and they'll get customers. And, of course, there's nothing wrong with that system exactly.

[6:20] I mean, it's helpful, I suppose, in a way, to find out what other people think, to read customer reviews. But what happens when we apply this kind of thinking to the gospel, and gospel ministers, and even churches?

Actually, I know our church is on Google. I don't know what our rating is. Anyway, Remember Jesus said, Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. In other words, if your 360 review, brother or sister, is all positive, five stars all around, glowing, Jesus says, Woe to you.

That's not what we're aiming at. You see, there's something false prophet-esque about universal approval. So, last week, you remember, at the end of chapter 2, in 2 Corinthians, Paul talked about how committed to sincerity he was.

And thus, how his ministry was divisive. Because the two go hand in hand. Read with me from chapter 2, verse 15. Paul says, For we are the aroma of Christ to God, among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing.

[7:44] To one, a fragrance from death to death. To the other, a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word.

But as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God, we speak in Christ. Remember the word peddlers. You know, hucksters, these sort of shady gospel salesmen. Of course, the shady gospel salesmen want to make sure that their gospel always gets five stars. That their gospel is recommended by all.

Nine out of ten spiritual gurus recommend the gospel of the peddlers. But Paul says, authentic gospel ministry divides audiences.

To some, it smells like life. You know, like the great outdoors, a fresh blooming meadow. You know, wow, this message is life calling me on to life to the full.

[8:48] To some, it smells like death, a rotting carcass. I grew up in an old house in the UK. I remember one time under the floorboards in the dining room, it was wintertime.

A rat must have died. And the smell was nauseating. We tried to spray some tropical air freshener or something to cover it up, but it just made it worse.

Now, it had this fruity, rotten stench of death. It reaped, right? And when I think about it, it still makes me gag, right? Paul is saying that that is how the gospel smells to some people.

It smells like death. And in fact, he says that's how gospel ministers smell, right? I've had a shower this morning, but he's saying in verse 15, we are the aroma of Christ, right?

Again, think about how you can't neatly separate out the message from the messenger, can you?

As Paul flings out the gospel, he gets covered in the smell of it himself and some people love him and some people hate him.

[9:59] And that means, I think, that we have to be very wary in an age of five-star ratings not to judge Paul or the gospel or gospel ministry this way.

You know, if anything, I think we should expect not just three stars but one-star ratings, don't you? I mean, the vast mass of humanity, if we're looking for the average customer of you, Jesus says the vast mass of humanity are heading down the great wide road that leads to destruction.

And even among religious people, you know, I'm thinking about all the churches out there, I don't think we should expect any different. Paul is talking here in the context of so-called Christian ministers.

He says we are not like so many peddlers of the word of God. You know, the vast majority are peddlers promoting a false gospel which I think then is a challenge to each one of us, isn't it?

Are we prepared to take our stand with the minority, brothers and sisters? And I think this plays out in a whole host of ways, I'll just sort of rattle them off, but do you decide your exegetical opinions about certain passages based on the popularity of that decision or that position?

[11:30] Do you decide which doctrines you hold to based on how widespread that view is? Do you decide what you think about people gospel ministers based on their average customer review?

Because, you know, every passage, the more I've studied these things, right, every passage is apparently open to interpretation. You can always find a German liberal scholar who doesn't believe it.

Every doctrine is disputed. Every hero is someone's villain. So if all we're being led by is popular opinion or even, I would say, if popular opinion just holds a significant sway in your heart, you think, there's something to it.

I would say we are in grave danger of walking away from Christ, the Christ who was crucified by popular opinion. temptation. So then, as we continue working our way through this letter, these are the kinds of themes Paul continues to talk about.

See, in verse 1, he says, are we beginning to commend ourselves again or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you? Right? In the ancient world, this was the five-star rating system, letters of recommendation.

[12:53] Such and such, a traveling preacher, begins his speech by listing his credentials. I've got a PhD from Jerusalem, studied under the great professor What's-His-Face, and here's a letter signed by him recommending my ministry.

And of course, Paul could have engaged in such boasting himself, certainly in his old life. He had studied under Gamaliel, he was a young up-and-coming rising star among the Pharisaic sect, and even after his conversion, I mean, he could have played tip-for-tap with the best of them, couldn't he?

Name-dropping his connections with the Apostle Peter and James, the Jerusalem Church, the church in Antioch, Barnabas is a mate of mine. Paul had his credentials on paper, but actually, you see, in coming to Christ, Paul had renounced all of these worldly ways of evaluating people.

Back at the beginning of 1 Corinthians, you may remember, Paul talks about the wisdom of the cross, and how God has deliberately destroyed these kinds of valuation systems through the cross. God deliberately chose a weak message, and a foolish way of salvation, to shame the strong and powerful. And God chooses weak people, foolish people, not the great ones of the earth, to belong to his people, not the strong and powerful.

[14:21] people. So Paul eschews the worldly methods of speech and rhetoric, triumphant, self-aggrandizing ministry.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 9, he says, For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.

When he says last of all, there he's thinking about that triumphant procession again. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands, which all the Greeks look down upon.

When reviled, we bless, when persecuted, we endure, when slandered, we entreat. We have become and are still like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

[15:24] So then, no wonder, in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 16 we'll come to this, he will say to the Corinthians, from now on therefore we regard no one according to the flesh, even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

To judge people based on outward appearances, or based on, not just outward appearances, but kind of worldly data points, you know, fleshly data points. Paul says these categories, we would actually, we would exclude Christ if we used these categories.

Why would we worship the embarrassing Nazarene donkey who died on a cross? Unless we were convinced that God has exalted precisely this man to be the king of kings.

Why would we follow the teachings of a bunch of fishermen in Galilee? Unless we had come to believe that university degrees and accolades and institutional scholarship and so on and prestige didn't really matter that much when it comes to truly knowing God.

And so Paul says we need to have a different way of thinking about people's credentials. And here is his answer in verse 2. He says, you yourselves are our letter of recommendation written on our hearts to be known and read by all.

[16:49] Now this is interesting. Notice that in this verse Paul doesn't say that our letter of recommendation is written on your hearts. No, Paul is saying that you are written on our hearts.

Now if you look very closely at this verse, if your Bible's got footnotes, you might notice a footnote that says some manuscripts actually do have your hearts. Don't let that confuse you. All that is telling you is that the scribes and scholars have been very confused by this pronoun here for many, many years.

But we know what the original pronoun is. It's just that everyone's wondering what on earth is Paul talking about. Our hearts is in the original, but someone fairly early on didn't like that.

Found that kind of confusing and pretty much everyone has since. Likewise, in verse 3, I think the majority of scholars would suggest that Paul must have shifted in verse 3 to talking about the Corinthians hearts when he says, and you show that you're a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

But let me put it to you, I just want to disagree with everyone. What is it about this verse that means Paul must have shifted to talking about the Corinthians?

[18:12] I see no evidence of that. And so, on the contrary, instead of insisting that Paul must be mixing his metaphors or jumping around and that this section might be slightly incoherent which is where everyone seems to go, that seems to be the most popular view.

I would say that Paul's metaphor is quite consistent and straightforward. When you think about these letters of recommendation, you've got to have the letter itself, the person, the letter is to, the person who wrote the letter, the person who delivered the letter, something that the letter is written on and something that the letter is written with.

And all of these things are consistent in these verses. Number one, the letter is the Corinthians themselves. You are our letter of recommendation, Paul says.

The letter is the Corinthians themselves. Number two, the letter is to all. Right? So anyone and everyone can read it, Paul says. Number three, the letter is from Christ.

Number four, the letter is being delivered by Paul. Number five, the letter is written on Paul's heart and the hearts of his ministry colleagues.

[19:32] And number six, the letter is written with the spirit of the living God, not with ink. You see, I think that's all consistent. There's really no need to bring the hearts of the Corinthians into the metaphor at this point.

So the upshot of all this then is that Paul's love for the Corinthians, which has been brought wrought on his heart by the spirit. That is what ought to recommend him to them.

That's what he's saying. Did we not love you? Paul is saying. Did we take advantage of you? Did we swindle you? Did we use you? Did you discover us to be peddlers?

No, you yourselves know that we didn't. And everyone we meet, everyone we run into, knows that you are on our hearts, that we love you. Now, of course, that's not the end of the chapter, and I certainly don't think that Paul's heart is the only one that the spirit has written on, or that the spirit is at work in.

But I think that shift comes gradually as we work through the chapter, kind of Paul builds up to it. So you see in verse 4, he starts to talk about his ministry. In verse 4, he says, Such is the confidence

that we have through Christ toward God, not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of the new covenant, of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit.

[21:06] For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. Now, again, you remember at the end of chapter 2, Paul asked that very relatable question, who is sufficient for these things?

And how can anyone possibly bear the weight of faithful gospel ministry, the kind of ministry that brings so much whiplash, the kind of ministry that stands on the precipice of eternity, right? The ministry that grants some people eternal life and condemns some people to hell. It's an unfathomable responsibility for a mere man, isn't it? How can a small creature, just a frail human being, bear such an infinite weight?

And so here Paul answers that question. Our sufficiency, of course, doesn't come from ourselves, but from God. So we are sufficient in verse 6, but it's not because of anything intrinsic to us. It's not because of something we have by nature, or even something granted to us by God's common grace. No, you remember, Jesus said in John chapter 15, I am the vine, you are the branches.

[22:15] Apart from me, you can do nothing. Paul is saying the same kind of thing here. We have no righteousness, no spiritual health or life within us, no flicker of light or spark or something apart from the new life in Christ, the Spirit.

And in verse 6, notice Paul begins here to talk about the new covenant. He says, God has made us sufficient to be ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.

Now, Paul is referring here to Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. So let me put those up on the screen for you. You can turn them up in your Bibles if you want to see more of the context, but here are the key verses.

Jeremiah 31, 31. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

[23:29] And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

You see that language that Paul is picking up on here, Jeremiah 31 is about the new covenant, when the law will be written on our hearts. This is why, actually, he says in the new covenant, Jeremiah says in the new covenant, there will be no need for a hierarchy of prophets, priests and kings to act as mediators for God's people.

Because every one of God's people will be able to know him directly from the least of them to the greatest. Of course, that is because in the new covenant, there is only one all-sufficient prophet, priest and king, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And by the Holy Spirit, we have all been grafted into him. And so, in Ezekiel 36, Ezekiel 36 is the other passage Paul is alluding to.

If you've never read Ezekiel 36, let me encourage you to read. Start in chapter 34, go all the way to chapter 37 at least. It's the most wonderful and exciting and coolest, you know, amazing part of the Old Testament.

[24:50] It's just one of these glorious passages about the new covenant. And right in the middle of it, the Lord says, On that day, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you.

I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers and you shall be my people and I will be your God. Aren't these just the most beautiful promises? Especially for those of us who know the natural stubbornness of our hearts.

Sometimes I know. Trying to get through to me is like banging your head against the brick wall. I'm sorry about that. But in God's grace, you see, he transplants and transforms our hearts.

When the Spirit of God enters into a person's life, the first thing he does is remove that heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh, a soft, teachable, living heart so that we can start to relearn God's ways of righteousness.

[25:57] So back in 2 Corinthians, Paul is riffing on this image, these passages from the Old Testament and he's saying that first of all the love in his own heart for the Corinthians, that was a gift of the Spirit, equipping him to be a servant of the new covenant.

And secondly, of course, his aim in serving others is to bring them life as well, by bringing them into the new covenant too. The work that God has done in his life was not just for his sake alone, but to bring life to others.

So in verse 7, having talked about the new covenant, as you might expect, Paul takes us even further back, beyond the prophets, back into the days of Moses when the old covenant was established.

Because he wants to compare and contrast the two. I think most likely the super apostles, the people causing trouble in Corinth, who were undermining Paul's ministry there, these people, peddlers of God's word, bringing their own letters of recommendation, etc.

Most likely these men were trying to take the people back into the old covenant. The kinds of people we see in Galatians or in the book of Hebrews, Judaizers.

[27:08] And so that's why Paul here wants to spend some time not putting down the old covenant, but putting it in its place. Right? Showing off how the new covenant is so much more extraordinary and wonderful and glorious.

Remember what Jeremiah promised. This will be a new covenant, not like the old covenant. So in verse 7, see Paul calls the old covenant the ministry of death, carved in letters of stone.

He's obviously referring to the Ten Commandments. It's not that God's law was ever bad, or that the commandments in and of themselves bring death. But when God's holy law comes into contact with sinful human hearts, all it can ever do is condemn them.

That's why Paul calls Moses' ministry the ministry of death. And yet he says that ministry came with glory. Remember Moses' face when he came down the mountain, was shining with splendor.

The passage this time is Exodus 34. 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 know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.

[28:21] Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them.

Afterward, all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining.

And Moses would put the veil over his face again until he went in to speak with him. Right, so Paul is picking up on this extraordinary passage, and he's saying, look how much glory the first covenant came with.

And yet, this was the ministry of death. This was the ministry that was being brought to an end. In verse 9, this was the ministry of condemnation. But the ministry of the Spirit brings life.

[29:24] The ministry of the Spirit brings righteousness, in verse 9. The ministry of the Spirit is permanent, in verse 11. So Paul asks, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?

Indeed, the ministry of the Spirit has so much more glory than the old, that it has eclipsed the glory of the old. And it's like the sun has risen, and all the stars have disappeared. Or the king has come, and the mayor has been pushed into the shadows.

And Paul is not saying that the old covenant had no glory at all, but that now it has been outshone by the new covenant. And so finally, in verse 12, Paul says, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

So this last section is about Paul's boldness, or indeed the boldness of all of those who share his hope. Remember, he says, Moses had to cover up.

Moses had to put a veil over his face, so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. Now, in the Greek, the word for outcome there is the word telos. [30 : 34] It means the goal of something, or the end of something, or the purpose of something. Where is something ultimately leading towards? So the question is, what was the purpose of the old covenant?

What was the goal or the end of it? And of course, the answer is Christ. In Romans 10, Paul uses the same word. He says, brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them, that is the Jews, his kinsmen, is that they may be saved.

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

For Christ is the end of the law, right? Or the telos, the purpose of the law. For righteousness to everyone who believes. See, what the people of God was supposed to see through the law was Christ.

And they were supposed to see that in Christ they would be granted a righteousness that they could not have gained by keeping the law. What they were supposed to see through the glorious, shining face of Moses was the face of Christ, whose glory would far surpass Moses'.

[31 : 52] But instead, because they were afraid, Paul says in verse 14, their minds were hardened. Moses had to cover his face. And in verse 14, Paul says, even to this day, that same kind of dynamic is playing out spiritually in every synagogue, which of course, you know, he would have sat through every Sabbath as a boy, listening to Moses being read out.

He says, but every Sabbath, they still cannot see, as they read the old covenant, they cannot see the true telos of the covenant. They cannot see where this covenant is pointing.

Because their hearts are veiled, their minds are hardened. They can't see how it all points to Christ. But in verse 16, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

Now the Lord is spirit, and when the spirit of the Lord is freedom, and we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.

For this comes from the Lord, who is the spirit. So as Paul wraps up here, he wants to focus our attention on the oneness of the Lord Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit.

[33 : 07] And you see in verse 17, his Trinitarian language, on the one hand, he says the Lord is the spirit. On the other hand, he says the spirit is the spirit of the Lord. So there's sort of some distinction and yet a unity.

The point is that when the Lord comes into a person's life, the spirit enters in. When the spirit comes into a person's life, the Lord enters in. You can't separate the two of them because they are one.

And whenever the Lord or the spirit comes into your life, freedom. Freedom from sin. Freedom from the law and the condemnation of the law.

And whenever the spirit comes into a person's heart, righteousness and transformation. The reference to we all in verse 18, I think finally makes explicit that Paul must be including the Corinthians here.

He's saying that we all now, like Moses, we are all able to behold the Lord face to face without a veil. Because once again in the new covenant, we don't have to send in a representative like Moses anymore to speak to God on our behalf.

[34 : 13] There are no mediators between God and men anymore except one. And since the Lord by his spirit is within us, writing his law on our hearts, Paul is saying now we all with unveiled face get to behold the glory of the Lord and we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

So unlike the people of the old covenant, we can approach the dazzling face of the Lord God without fear of the Lord Jesus without fear, without a veil over our faces.

And it's as we behold this glory that like Moses, we are being transformed by it. We ourselves start to shine. You know, our own faces, our own lives begin to reflect God's glory and we carry his glory with us.

I don't know if this is helpful, but I think of it a little bit like sometimes the scientists talk about mirror neurons.

Have you heard this language before? It's about the way that we socialize with one another. We start to sort of talk like people around us, especially the people we like. We start to mimic their facial

expressions.

[35 : 29] We tilt our heads if they tilt their heads. You know, we act like them. We start to think like them. We pick up their facial expressions and their mannerisms. I think Paul is saying something similar here.

And as he preaches the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is like a fragrant scent. It is like he is putting before people the radiant face of Christ.

And I would hasten to stress, just to make sure there's no confusion here. Paul is saying that this all happens through the preaching of Christ. Through the preaching of the word. Show us Christ.

Through the preaching of your word. It's not through literal images or visions of him. Actually, those distract us. It's through the preaching that we behold the glory of Christ.

Through the preaching of his cross, can you see the love of Christ on the cross? Can you see the righteousness of Christ on the cross?

[36 : 31] That he would not just overlook our sin, but actually deal with it. Can you see the majesty of Christ as he sits enthroned in heaven above all other powers? He is the king of kings and the Lord of lords.

Can you see the mercy of Christ as he sends out his gospel to the ends of the earth to make disciples of all nations? Can you see the patience of Christ that he would wait until the day that the father has said and finally all of his enemies will be put under his feet?

You see what I'm talking about? As we learn about Christ through his gospel and we behold his glory, his goodness in its many dimensions, it transforms us.

We learn patience as we see the beauty of his patience. We learn mercy as we see the beauty of his mercy and so on. So as we wrap up, think about authentic gospel ministry.

This whole letter is about partnering together in authentic gospel ministry. So I think it makes sense that Paul drifts, as it were, from himself to the Corinthians. He's saying, this is how I minister, but actually we're all in this together.

[37 : 39] We're all partners here together. This is how we all do authentic gospel ministry together. What we need to understand from this passage is that at its heart, authentic gospel ministers are always infatuated with Christ.

We are besotted with him. We're in love with him. Isn't that right? That's why our tagline, our slogan, Ian's already mentioned it, whatever you call it, we love Jesus, means so much.

It's not just a throwaway line. At least I hope not. This is the ball game, isn't it? Not to put it too severely, but if that doesn't resonate with you, if your Christianity is not fundamentally at its core about being in love with the King of Kings, enthralled by Jesus, I don't think you could really call that Christianity.

You know, that's not okay. There's something wrong with you because there's nothing wrong with him. Now, I don't mean that it always has to feel like a honeymoon with the Lord.

If you've got a bit of a sensitive conscience or something and you're slightly worried about that. No, I don't mean that. I think that we all know how love matures. It strengthens and deepens into something much sweeter than kind of flighty feelings.

[39 : 04] And I know that over time, as we struggle against our sin, we should expect to wax and wane in our devotion and affection for the Lord. I don't want to kick you while you're down if you're going through a hard patch just at the moment.

But I do want you to think about the goal, and I want to encourage you to keep fighting for it. We are aiming for, with the Lord, the kind of depth of feeling that, well, the Bible talks about the two becoming one flesh in marriage, doesn't it?

And our marriages on earth are only a pale illustration of the kind of transformative, loving union that we can have with Christ. So at St. Lucia Bible Church, our goal is to behold Christ ever more clearly each day.

Each week, my aim is to preach Christ so that you can see Him clearly. Over morning tea, our one another ministries with one another are about pointing one another to Christ so that we can see Him clearly, so that our affections are stirred for Him.

We see the loveliness of our great husband, to gaze upon every aspect and dimension of His glory. And then, of course, our goal as partners in gospel ministry is to keep helping others to see the glory of the Lord Jesus so that they can have life and freedom and righteousness and they'll be transformed in the light of His face.



[ 40 : 37 ] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Loving Father, thank you for this glorious passage that points us to our even more glorious Lord Jesus.

We pray that each and every day as we read the Bible together or on our own at home, as we catch up with one another and try and speak the gospel to one another, that you would keep working in our hearts by your Spirit, transforming us more and more by the glory that we behold in the Lord Jesus.

Help us to be more and more shining and radiant with mercy, with patience, with love, with kindness, with righteousness and courage and goodness and all those beautiful things that we see in Him. Help us to be truly loving Jesus in our hearts, in our families, in our relationships each day. And we pray these things for His sake. Amen.