

The Anti-Prosperity Gospel

2 Corinthians 3: 7 – 18

This morning, I want to continue our conversation about the vision statement that I feel is a good fit for our church. You may agree or disagree with it, it's okay with me. The vision statement is not scripture. It's just a way to summarize, condense and keep in the forefront of the church's mind its mission.

I'm open to other suggestions and would love to sit down and discuss it with you over a cup of coffee, but not with a Starbuck's 7-dollar cup of coffee - unless you're buying!

The first part of the vision statement that I mentioned last week has to do with investment, and I tried to make the point that God has sacrificially and lovingly invested in us, even before the beginning of time when his Holy Spirit hovered over his creation and envisioned, planned, and initiated carrying out His full purpose for His magnificent creation ...

that we would come to know Him personally and fully through our redemption and reconciliation to the Creator.

that we would experience salvation and restoration and healing

that we come to share in his righteousness, his inheritance and his glory that he graciously procured for us through his perfect Son's bodily sacrifice on the cross, along with the forgiveness of our sins.

Above all that we would acknowledge that he did all this for His own glory, for He alone deserves all the praise and glory we can muster because He is Creator and Lord overall, both heaven and earth.

And my argument continues:

That if God was willing to do this sort of investing in us, should we not try to invest in his church, his ordained, beloved, and divinely established organism which is his body here on earth? If for no other reason, we should proceed with a posture of gratitude and thankfulness, to say nothing of love.

What other legitimate response can we possibly have toward God?

Part 2 of my vision statement then, has to do with the idea of reflecting. In other words, the investment I personally make becomes a reflection or testament of my love for God, his people and those He seeks to save.

Investment is a reminder to each of us that above all things, love is the primary impetus or motivator in our willingness to be a part of God's magnificent and wondrous plan for all of creation. And God gives us and fill us with his love which moves us to invest in his plan and seek to carry it out.

Doesn't this sound like a good reason to invest?

So that we can say that we are united with God in his glorious mission of human redemption and salvation and total reclamation of creation itself?

So, having recapped last week's message, allow me to say something that may surprise you. I'll say it in the form of question:

What if I were to tell you that the best has already come?

How would this news strike you?

I dare say not to well, because let's face it, it seems to be that human nature is always looking for the next big thing to come along. We always seem to be in this improvement phase. We're always in this searching mode. As a matter of fact, some might say that if you've stopped searching, you've stopped living.

It's almost as if searching is more desirable and honorable than finding. If you tell someone that you're on a quest to find something – say yourself or peace or tranquility, they'll cheer you on and wish you the best of luck. But if you tell them that you've found peace and contentment and joy in Jesus? They may give you a look that seems to say... you stopped at Jesus? Like they're disappointed with you or something because you stopped your search.

Let me put it another way ... Maybe you think to yourself ...

My job is good, but I'd like to find a better one that pays more money.

My car is good, but it would be sure nice to have one that is shinier and newer and is more technologically advanced.

My home is good, but I really wish I could have that extra large refrigerator I saw at Home Depot the other day.

My life is good, but I know it could be better. I just need to eat better, exercise more and pick up a new hobby that really satisfies me. And someday everything will be just peachy, nearly perfect. If we think this way, my guess is that we're just fooling ourselves and we're going to be in for great disappointment.

Do you see what I'm trying to get at here?

A lot of the time we tend to be in a state of discontentment or dissatisfaction, so we look to the future to hopefully discover and experience things that are going to make our lives more fulfilling, more satisfying, more significant. It's out there somewhere, I just have to find it.

This is why the prosperity Gospel is believed by so many people, because it preys on our insecurities, feelings of inadequacy and our hope that someday down the road God will see fit to materially reward us for following Him and his Son. We just have to hold on a little longer.

I suppose you could entitle my message this morning the anti-prosperity gospel because for once, I don't want you to look out there, somewhere out on the horizon for your ship to come in that promises to make your life all wonderful and peaceful, easy and fulfilled. That's fools' gold, a mirage.

And I also don't want you to look back over your shoulder and have a bunch of regrets and say things like if only I knew then what I know now, I would have made different decisions in my life and things would be a lot better for me today. I've met a lot of people who feel this way, who have all sorts of regrets.

No, what I want you to do for a moment this morning is settle into the here and now and believe with me that the best thing that could have ever happened to you has, in fact, already happened and is happening right now. All you have to do is recognize it and give thanks to God who is standing with open arms offering it to you right now.

Don't look behind you and exclaim woulda, coulda, shoulda. This is a life full of regrets, and it's so depressing. Believe me, I've done a lot of camping there.

And don't be so quick to look ahead and start humming ... The sun will come out tomorrow. This just exposes our dissatisfaction for life right now. Yes, maybe the sun will come out tomorrow, but what about today? What is God giving us right now?

Well, I'll tell you. He has given you and me, and He's giving us right now the ministry of His Holy Spirit. This is what I believe the Apostle Paul is talking about when he writes to the Corinthian Church in 2 Corinthians 3: 7 – 18.

In a nutshell he's saying, don't keep looking in the rearview mirror in an attempt to relive the past, and don't bemoan the fact that the glory days have passed you by.

Have you ever talked to someone like this who always wants to live in the past when life seemed to be so much happier and simpler and easier? They love to talk about gasoline when it was 25 cents a gallon and a candy bar cost 2 cents and children would actually go to the park to play a pickup game of baseball all by themselves. They didn't need a bunch of adults hovering over them to manage and organize and umpire the game. They would say ... Ah the good old days.

Well, the Apostle Paul is sort of saying this about the days of Moses. He admits they were the good old days too. Hey guys, don't you remember when Moses came down the mountain with the 10 Commandments and spoke to the people? Don't you remember how his face radiated with the glory of God because he had been in

the presence of God and his reflection was so bright that they couldn't even look directly at him, so Moses helped them out by covering his face with a veil? Those were the good old days. Paul admits this because God's glory attended Moses and is there anything better than witnessing God's glory?

Well, in fact Paul says there is something better! Yes, God's glory was reflected in Moses face when he spent time with God, but it was temporary and transitory and always faded away after a time.

As a matter of fact, this might be the very reason Moses covered his face in the first place. I used to think that Moses covered his face because the intensity of the radiance of the glory of God might somehow be harmful to the Israelites, so Moses covered his face to protect them.

Now I have my doubts. Maybe Moses covered his face so that the Israelites couldn't see the glory fade from Moses's face because if they did maybe unbelief and doubts and rebelliousness would creep back into their hearts and minds. They might say to themselves ... Moses' face isn't radiant. Why should I bother listening to him? Maybe this leadership and follower dynamic that God had set up with Israelites wasn't as solid as it could have been.

But in the final analysis, Paul surely knew one thing: As wonderful as it was for Moses and the Israelites to witness God's glory, it came up short and was incomplete and that something so much greater had already come on the scene and Paul called it surpassing glory.

And why did Paul call this new glory from God a surpassing glory? Well because Paul said that it was permanent. It didn't fade away and most importantly it brought to us life, eternal life.

You see, Paul compares the ministry of the law with the ministry of the spirit. And don't let the word ministry trip you up. Think of the word ministry as the goal or purpose. What is the goal or purpose or desired outcome of the law?

When we think about the ministry of God's law, we can think about its purpose. And what is the primary purpose for God's Law? Well, you might say that its purpose is to instruct people how to live in accordance with God's will, and you'd be almost 100 percent correct, but there's a little caveat to this, and that is that no human being can ever keep God's law perfectly. And this causes a great moral dilemma because if we can't keep God's law perfectly then we are guilty of breaking his law and are reckoned as sinners under the law who deserve God's holy and righteous punishment which brings judgment and separation from him forever.

And this is exactly what Paul says about the ministry of the law or the Old Covenant. As glorious as it was, as seen in the face of Moses, the law brought death in that through God's law, we recognize our feeble attempt at keeping the law and we recognize our sin. This is what Paul means when he writes, "*the ministry that brought death which was engraved in letters of stone.*"

We recognize our own condemnation in the light of God's holiness.

But Paul teaches us that there is a better, more brilliant glory that shines through by the ministry of God's Spirit. It is permanent. It is life – giving. It is righteousness. It is powerful and it's eternal. And it's now!

And maybe this is the most important point in these verses: The only way for us to see the new surpassing glory that God offers us is to see the truth of Christ in the Gospel.

Paul talks about those who still have the veil on. They are living in the past and attempting to gain their salvation through serving and following the law. And whatever glory or hope they have is quickly fading away just like it did in the days of Moses. They haven't discovered the new glory and truth in Christ, so Paul writes, "*even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.*"

The veil is unbelief. It is not believing in God's One and Only son for salvation!

Hear me clearly, Paul is not saying that the Old Covenant God made with the Israelites is bad or without truth. Paul says there is much value in the Old Covenant especially because we learn about our sin and our need for a Savior. There is a lot of glory of God to be seen there, but the story is incomplete.

Think of it this way: Let's say you decide to take a trip to Mount Everest, the tallest mountain in the world. And you go there and set up camp at base camp – at the foot of Mount Everest, which is at a very high altitude, but you never attempt to summit the mountain. You never ascend to its top – most peak.

The foot of Mount Everest is the Old Covenant . The views from there are glorious and spectacular and magnificent, but they are overshadowed by the mountain's peak which is the New Covenant – the one God makes with us through his Son Jesus Christ. This is the surpassing glory that Paul speaks about in 2 Corinthians 3: 7 – 18.

And it's for us now, today. For us who believe in God's Son. True, our future is bright and glorious in the most unimaginable ways, but that's still off in the future. What about today?

Paul says that today we can be bold. Bold to do what? To speak about Christ and offer others the same hope Christ offers us.

Paul says that we can be clear -minded – not like those who still have the veil on them and who cannot recognize the light that gives life to humanity.

Paul also says that we are free. Free to do what?

Maybe the better question is ... Whom are we free to be? We are free to be who God has called us to be because we have his powerful wise and loving spirit and ... *“where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”*

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

The Israelites' past with God was glorious. It shone in the face of Moses, their leader, but the story wasn't over.

Our future with Christ will be unimaginably glorious when we finally bask in his overwhelming presence. Because the story is reaching its culmination, but that's still a long way off for many of us.

But what about right now? We have the ministry of the Spirit that is of much greater glory because it's permeant, it's transformative, it is life – giving and God causes this glory to be reflected in our faces.

Amen.

