2 Corinthians 3: 7 – 4: 3

When preparing for this passage I was greeted by the use of the word “glory” so many times. Question – what is glory?

I am sure we all have our own ideas of what glory is. We have sung about the glory of the Lord shining in this place. What image or definition does it bring to your mind?

For me, I always summed it up as a holy righteousness. It is not until you have to expand upon the passage in a sermon that the true definition is forced to be found.

So I looked at definitions – and there are a few – six that I have written.

1. High renown or honour won by notable achievements. Well, that sounds sort of right, but in the context of the passage does not sit well. When speaking of the tablet of stone which had the ten commandments written on it, where does notable achievements come into it?
2. Praise, worship and thanksgiving offered to a deity. Again, the commandments were from God, not offered to Him.
3. Magnificence or great beauty. Again, misses the mark when speaking about ministry.
4. Thing that is beautiful, impressive or worthy of praise.
5. A luminous ring or halo. OK, that just is not what is being mentioned in this letter
6. The splendour and bliss of heaven – well, this rings true!

So, we have the splendour and bliss of heaven. When the ten commandments were given to the Israelites via Moses, they came with glory – the bliss of heaven. The scripture is referring to the account in Exodus 34 when Moses met with God on Mount Sinai and was given the commandments for the Israelites.

When he returned his face was radiant where the glory of the Lord had rested upon it. Moses had to wear a veil before people. Each time he met with God his radiance would be renewed.

I always thought that a veil was worn to protect onlookers from the blinding light of the glory – but we are told here it was so that they could not see that the light faded.

What does that mean though? The splendour and bliss of heaven would fade?

When we read this passage in 2 Corinthians we can see that it was not heaven that would fade, but the ministry of bringing glory to earth.

In the time of Moses, the law was the way in which God wanted to encourage His people to live, to encourage an attitude of heavenly living through the laws. However, the law was imperfect, because people are imperfect.

Rather than seeing the reason for the laws, people began to simply abide by them. If they fell short of the requirements then they could not see how a relationship with God could be rebuilt. Yes, the priests were there to mediate for them, but they did not truly understand about the forgiveness of God. Offering sacrifices was not a response of the heart in many cases.

The new ministry Paul is talking about is Jesus. Jesus is the new ministry to bring glory to earth – the splendour and bliss of heaven.

In comparison to Moses’ radiant face, Jesus is permanent. No veil is required as Jesus is the fulfilment of the law. Jesus, through the imparting of the Holy Spirit means that everyone has a direct relationship with God. Jesus is the high priest who will intercede on our behalf.

When Jesus died on the cross, and the temple curtain was split in two, this was the removal by God of the barrier between Him and His people. The temple curtain kept the ordinary people out of the most holy place in the temple, reserved only for priests to meet with God in His dwelling place. The removal of the curtain represented God no longer being separated from His people, who were not just the Israelites anymore – and therefore His people were not separated from Him.

It may seem harsh that Paul states that Moses and the law no longer have any glory. And let us out ourselves in the position of the Corinthians Paul is writing to. They had accepted Jesus – but could you imagine the upheaval of leaving behind all the laws and tradition that surrounded Jewish belief. Leaving behind beliefs and structures that were ancient and encouraged into the new belief. The traditional Jews would have been scoffing at this novel and new tradition Paul was encouraging.

But it is true – Jesus IS the new covenant. He has shown complete forgiveness of sins by living in accordance of the spirit of the law – which we know is love. He has shown us the ultimate willingness that God has, to live sacrificially for every single one of us. His willingness to see us condemn His Son to death, and yet offer us forgiveness despite that, and show that we have an invitation to follow Him, even to death, and to join with Him in the salvation of eternal life.

Paul states that when the OT is read today it is still dulled by the same veil – unless it is read in the light of Christ. All that is written in the OT points to the promise of Jesus.

Jesus is not mentioned directly – but everything that God states regarding the covenant and forgiveness points to Jesus. When we read the OT it is not a different book to the NT. The laws given may have been overwritten, but God’s intention of bringing His glory to earth is not. His glory has always been constant – it is only the ministry of bringing that on earth that has changed.

Every time we live in accordance with the Holy Spirit, bringing His love to others whether by deed, word or prayer, we are reflecting His glory – the splendour and bliss of heaven. We cannot do that in our own strength or by our own actions. It is only through the ministry of the Spirit can that be achieved.

We need to stand and act in the way of love. Our actions must reflect the love and mercy of God. All of our actions should be in His accordance so that people will see Him.

Our actions may not be understood by everyone. It is not that we put a veil over what or why we act in the ways that we do – but a veil that they may choose to wear.

People can choose to deny seeing God in action, putting things down to magic, co-incidence or trickery. And in some cases they can be right – there are plenty of people around who would try to emulate something that will gain people’s amazement.

It is not our job to judge, it is our job to live our lives in accordance with Jesus, through His Spirit, so that His glory may be seen. How others re-act to that glory is their decision.

Although we do not have to follow all the laws that were written in the OT and imparted through Moses, we do still need to live in accordance with the desire God had when He gave them. As we live our lives we need to continue to speak the truth and allow God to act.

It can be difficult to find ways to evangelise and face the possible re-action of others, but we are encouraged here not to lose heart, to gain strength through the Holy Spirit. As we speak truth we will be ministering the glory of Christ into this world – bringing the splendour and bliss of heaven. That has GOT to be worth doing!