



This Week

OUR MISSION

As God's disciples, we the men, women and children of Apostles are united in the preaching, teaching and sharing of God's Word in its truth and purity.

By God's grace, we will nurture believers and joyfully spread the Word of God in our community and throughout the world, all to His glory.

This Week's Sermon: 2 Cor. 3:12ff

THE VEIL HAS BEEN REMOVED

Pastor Jay Bickelhaupt

It is always advantageous to compare. This morning if we have not done so already many of us will most likely read the paper, sifting through the ads looking for good deals. When we find an item that we need or would like we most likely will compare the price with other stores especially if it is a large ticket item. Before major surgery or aggressive medical treatment many choose to get a second opinion in order to compare different diagnoses and procedures so that they can make an informed decision how best to proceed. We are constantly making comparisons and evaluating what is best in our lives. This week I am going to begin repairing the shower in the basement of the parsonage. I need to tear out the old so that the new can be installed. I need your help to make a decision. I have two hammers in my tool box and am not sure what is best to use. Both came from Home Depot. Should I use this little plastic one? Or should I use my sturdy east wing? Now, in a few seconds or less we have already compared the two and have most likely come to the conclusion, for an obvious reason, that the metal hammer is what I need for the project. However, just because we came to that conclusion does not mean that the plastic Home Depot hammer is worthless and should be tossed away in the garbage.

In our lesson for today the apostles Paul makes a comparison between the Old Covenant of the law and the New Covenant of the gospel. He does this by taking us back to the time when God gave the law to his people, Israel, at Mt. Sinai after they left Egypt. God communicated the glorious message of the law to his chosen nation by speaking through Moses. Moses was instructed by God to ascend Mount Sinai so that the Lord could speak to him. Moses received from God many instructions along with the two stone tablets on which were written the ten commandments. Moses took all of God's laws and regulations back to the people. However, when the Israelites saw him come down from the mountain they were terrified and ran because Moses' face was

radiant from God's glory. I can only imagine his face shining brightly. Just imagine what you would do if Vicar's face was shining brightly when he turned to us after prayer! We would probably all be a little startled and maybe run away wondering what was going on. God allowed Moses' face to reflect the Lord's glory to teach the Israelites and to teach you and me a lesson. First, the Lord wants us to understand that the law is important because it shares what he wants us to do and what he doesn't want us to do. The law is glorious! But Moses' face did not glow forever. After he communicated with the Is-

2 Cor. 3:12ff

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 keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading 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, 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.

raelites, Moses would put a veil over his face so that they would not stare at it while the reflected glory faded away. God used a very powerful object lesson to teach his people that the ministry of the law, which is referred to as the Old Covenant, was temporary. God used the law to create for himself a unique people out of the Israelites from which the Savior would come. The glorious ministry of the law was only to prepare them for the more glorious ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The law was not the intended to be the end-all and be-all of their religion. The law, the do's and the don'ts of God, is not intended to be the end-all and be-all of our religion either. This morning, the Holy Spirit through this fascinating portion of his word teaches us that the veil has been

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removed through Christ. We cannot earn salvation through works but instead we can boldly live in Christ's work which assures us of salvation. And now may the good news that Jesus Christ freed us from the law move you to boldly live to do Christ's work.

Boldly living in Christ's work

The little plastic hammer that I have is not the proper tool for the job. No matter how hard I try I will not be able to fix the problem in the shower. Paul compared the law with the Gospel and through the Spirit realized the tremendous treasure that he possessed in Jesus. Our Savior is what is needed in order to have salvation. In verse 12 Paul begins by saying that because we have the certain hope that comes through Christ we can be very bold! Think of the ministry that you and I are involved in. We boldly proclaim to others the glorious message of sins forgiven that creates with them a right relationship with their Lord. Later in the service Vicar Casmer is going to confess his sins to you through the liturgy. As a congregation we will remind him that his sins are forgiven. When we do that we don't say, "We think that your sins are forgiven. Good luck." No, we proclaim it boldly! So also when we confess our sins Vicar is not going waver in his proclamation of sins forgiven but instead he is going to speak to your hearts boldly with the authority of Christ.

We don't say, "We think that your sins are forgiven. Good luck." No, we proclaim it boldly!

Jesus does not leave us uncertain but through his resurrection from the dead he makes us absolutely certain of salvation. God's pure Gospel imparts to you and me the truth that makes us heirs of heavenly glory. The good news of heaven makes us very bold because we can be very sure in Christ. We have a confident bold ministry!

We have a ministry even more bold than what Moses had. Moses was a messenger of the Old Covenant. The law of God is glorious but remember that the glory faded to teach that the ministry of the law is only temporary. The law serves the purpose to prepare hearts for the good news of what Jesus has done and what he will do. Yet, the Israelites did not understand the temporary nature of it. Paul says in verse 14 that their minds were dull. Literally, their minds were hardened or as we would say today they were thick headed. They thought that the law was the final word of God. They led themselves to believe that the do's and don'ts of the Lord was the end-all and be-all of life. They tried to achieve a right relationship with God through their own good deeds and actions. They did not put their hope in what

the Savior would accomplish but instead they put their hope in their own good works. The people of Moses' time were not only guilty of this. Paul says in verse 15 that when the law of Moses was read in a worship service during Paul's time that people's hearts were covered with a veil. A veil obstructs someone's vision or makes seeing difficult. If I put a veil in front of my eyes I am not able to see who is sitting in church today, right? The Israelites' eyes of faith were covered with the veil of the law which obstructed faith to see clearly. They firmly believed that by following God's laws and regulations they could get into heaven. How could God's people be so blind? Paul tells us, "Only in Christ is the veil taken away."

People today who do not know Christ have a veil placed over their hearts. If you do not look at Christ you are motivated by the law to look at yourself, and in yourself there is not certain hope of being saved. Three weeks ago I was involved in a conversation with two other people from our community about religion. Surprisingly, the woman to whom I was speaking looked at the other man and asked, "Are you excited about going to heaven, Maynard?" To which Maynard replied, "Well I hope that I will be there. I have done my best and life was good." There is not an ounce of comfort in that reply. I am sure that you have heard others say something similar. When an individual does not have Christ in their life they will rely on the law— rely on what they can do— which is not reliable at all. Even if a person tries to do their best their best will not earn for themselves a place at the heavenly banquet because we have a God who demands perfection. "Be perfect because I the Lord your God am perfect."

Sometimes even we who call ourselves Christian have a veil covering our own hearts. Many times we fail to understand that we are governed by the Lord. We can do nothing to make our God pleased with us. But instead we need to know that God is pleased with us only in Christ! Our salvation does not, nor will it ever, depend on how much we give to church through our offering. Your salvation and mine does not depend on how much we pray, how loud we sing, how many committees we are on, how good we are to our kids, how much we love our spouses, how faithful we are at our jobs, or how obedient we are to our parents. You are not saved by your church attendance or by being a member of Apostles Lutheran Church. Our salvation has nothing to do with what we have done but it has everything to do with what Christ has done! We need to be aware of this truth! The law does not give a person true hope but steals true hope away. The perfect law of God makes us realize that often what we do or don't do is a sin. The law of God tells us that as sinners we will die. If we continue to live in the law we will not earn heaven but instead we will receive the hell that our sins deserve. Remember the glory of the law faded so that the glory

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of Christ would be revealed. Our salvation does not depend on what we have done but it depends on what Christ has done. Therefore we do not have to rely on our sinful selves who are unreliable but we can rely on Jesus, the solid rock of our salvation. We can be very bold living in Christ's perfect work.

Bolding living to do Christ's work

This morning in the Gospel reading you will hear about your Savior who was transfigured (changed) before his disciples' very eyes. Jesus' clothes became dazzling white showing that his life was perfect. God the Father will tell you again that he was pleased with Jesus' life so we are to listen to him. Through the message of Christ's holy life, which was lived as your substitute, the Holy Spirit tears away the veil of the law from your heart. Through the knowledge of Christ you have been set free. You are no longer forced to obey the law in order to get right with God because Jesus obeyed the law for you. You and I are no longer slaves to sin because Jesus conquered sin on the cross and declared that the power of sin was finished. The good news of Christ proclaims to you that you have been set free from death because Jesus triumphed over the grave! We have freedom in Christ and we are being transformed into his likeness. You are no longer spiritually dead but instead are spiritually alive. Christ has claimed me and you to be his people who return his love to him and others in our lives. We are being transformed into the likeness of Christ by the power of the Spirit! What an awesome gift of having God's glory shine upon us directly through the Gospel and what a beautiful reminder of the glory that you and I get to look forward to in heaven. The spiritual dullness is gone. We were spiritually blind but now we see. The veil has been removed so that you and I can boldly live in Christ's work!

2 Corinthians 3:18 - 4:2

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 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 every man's conscience in the sight of God.

We are not like Moses who had to wear a veil to hide the fading glory of the law. The glory that we have in Christ will never fade so we don't have to hide it but instead proclaim it.

If we boldly live in Christ's work we should also boldly live to do Christ's work. There are so many hearts in

our community who are seeking peace and there are so many hearts in this church who have the peace they need. You have been filled once again today with the greatest message that there is! You are forgiven and saved. Now what are you as individuals and we as a congregation going to do? First we are going to recognize the awesome God-given privilege to be a part of the Gospel ministry which will prevent us from losing heart. How could we as a congregation ever be unhappy or unsatisfied with what we have? We do not have the biggest church in Billings, we certainly do not have the strongest numbers in attendance, we do not have a grade school but the lack of these things does not in any way diminish the ministry that we have been blessed with. We will not lose heart because by the Lord's mercy we have the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have the greatest ministry in the world.

We have the greatest ministry in the world.

What would you think if after church I would start my car, put it in neutral, and push my car with my family in it to Stella's diner in order to have lunch? You would most likely think I was crazy. I do not need to push a perfectly fine-running car along because the engine is built to do all the work, right?

The message that we have is powerful, also. Yet there are many who try to foolishly help it along. Paul says that as messengers of the Gospel we need not have secret agendas. We do not seek to gain members so that there is more money in the offering plate. We do not want to grow the membership so that there will be more people to donate to the building project. We do not seek members to have fresh blood on the council or in the ladies' guild. That is not the reason we proclaim Jesus. Motivated by Christ's love we lovingly seek out lost souls for the Lord. We do so through the Gospel.

Last week I called a friend in Minnesota. On his answering machine I was told that their Christmas service would begin at 10 a.m. on Christmas day and that the New Year's Eve service was held at 7 p.m. Either they plan ahead or the message is old and needs to be changed.

We have the message that is timeless. Paul says there is not need to change or distort it in any way. If we change any part of Scripture we will simply be preaching human opinions. May we never fall into the smorgasbord mentality of religions where we pick and choose what to proclaim to people. God has removed the veil and Jesus Christ is the message we will proclaim every time. As God's people let us set forth this week to proclaim the truth of God's word to as many

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people as we can. Think of coworkers. Think of family members that we can share the unveiled message with. May these words unite us as a congregation even stronger so that together as a family of believers we boldly live in Christ's work and so that we always boldly live to do his glorious work. This is our prayer and Christ is our confidence. Amen!

Jay Bickelhaupt is serving as pastor at Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church in Billings, Montana. For contact information, please visit us at www.apostlesmt.net.

Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church
Billings, Montana

Worship Services Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and Monday at 6:30 p.m.

Sunday School and Adult Bible Classes Sunday at 9:15 a.m.

Men's Bible Study Monday morning at 6:30 a.m.

Women's Study Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m.

Contact the pastor at (406) 656-7141 about the opportunities to join a **Bible Information Class**.

More information and resources are available on our website at www.apostlesmt.net or by contacting the church office at (406) 656-7141.

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Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church
3140 Broadwater Avenue
Billings, MT 59102

Mail To:

Visit us on the web at www.apostlesmt.net.