

## In the Transforming Power of His Presence 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

### INTRODUCTION

The Berkeley Pit is a copper-mine-turned-toxic-lake located in Butte, Montana. Butte was first established as a mining camp in 1864. When copper was discovered in the early 1900s Butte became a bustling boomtown almost overnight. At the height of its production throughout the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, Butte was responsible a full 1/3 of the copper used in the United States.

After the end of World War II, demand for copper dropped significantly and the mining operations began to lose money. They needed a better, faster, cheaper, more efficient way of getting the copper out of hill. Their solution? Rather than dig shafts into the hill like they'd been doing for years, they decided to blow off the top of the hill and mine the copper from the open pit."

Their strategy worked for about 40 years. Finally economic realities forced them into bankruptcy. On their way out of town the company shut off the pumps they'd been using for years to keep water from collecting at the bottom of the pit. And slowly the water level began to rise. Forty billion gallons of water later, Berkeley Pit became one of the largest lakes in the United States.

The ground around Butte, Montana is full of pyrite, a mineral better known to you and me as "fool's gold." When you take pyrite and combine it with air and water they produce... *sulfuric acid!* So this 40 billion gallon lake became a huge vat of sulfuric acid. And so it sat while scientists and local officials tried to figure out what to do.

One night in 1995, a major winter storm swept over the region. A flock of snow geese was passing over the Berkeley Pit just as the storm was its worst. Not knowing any better, they took refuge in its waters. When the residents of Butte woke up the next morning, they found the carcasses of 342 geese floating on the surface of Berkeley Pit. The worst fears of the local officials had come to pass: Berkeley Pit was now a death pit.

Several years later members of the biology department at the University of Montana discovered a black glob floating around in water. It turned out to be a kind of yeast that had the most remarkable property. Like a sponge, this glob was absorbing 95% of toxins, transforming that death pit into a resource of drinkable water. Every other method that had been tried only worked at about 10% and couldn't keep pace.

When those biologists ran their assessments on this black glob, they were amazed to find that in the entire natural world, this black glob yeast occurs in only one place: in the digestive tracts of geese. Yes, in goose poop.

Could there a more perfect illustration of how the presence of God works in our lives? Our biggest messes, our most daunting problems, our most toxic situations ... even the most sinful life ... can be transformed into something that causes the world to say "God is at work here!"

Like that black glob yeast, the presence of Christ has the power to soak up human violence, brokenness, hatred, and division, and then purify it, transform it, and give it new life. God's presence can take the very worst in us and turn it to good.

That's what our text teaches us today:

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 ... (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

Today we wrap up our sermon series titled "IN IT TOGETHER." As you recall we have been looking at how we – the community of faith – work together in harmony to help each other move forward in faith. Today the key we see is that we are together in the TRANSFORMING POWER OF HIS PRESENCE.

This is the Sunday in our church calendar that we commemorate that wonderful event when Peter, James and John tagged along with Jesus to the top of Mount Tabor and witnessed the appearance of Moses and Elijah.

- They saw these great heroes of the faith right before their eyes.
- They heard the conversation as Moses and Elijah encouraged Jesus prior to his crucifixion.
- They saw the change – the transfiguration – in the appearance of Jesus.

In this passage Paul points to that truth when he describes how Jesus "transforms" us, comparing that to the change in the appearance of Moses as we saw in the Old Testament reading today (Exodus 34).

Things change when God is present. It is impossible to enter the presence of God and leave unchanged.

- You can't read the Scriptures and continue to think like you used to think.
- You can't enter into a small group Bible study or even into a larger group worship service and avoid His presence.
- Remember what Jesus said?

Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:20)

Look around you. There are more than two or three people here, so that means God is present here. And it means that because you are here ... and God is here ... there will be some transformation that occurs in your life today.

When Moses spent time in God's presence, his face glowed. I can't guarantee that happens to us today, but I do believe people should begin to see a noticeable difference about you because you've been in His presence. In fact, in this text, Paul tells us there are three changes that are likely happen when you spend time in the presence of God:

## **#1: YOUR DISCOURAGEMENT LEVEL WILL DROP**

The first verse of chapter four identifies this one:

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. (2 Corinthians 4:1)

In the verses that follow, Paul will describe the realities of his life like this:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

And despite all of that, he was not discouraged. Because of God's presence in his life, Paul could look at the circumstances engulfing him and know that God was still sovereign.

A few years ago, the New York City transit company reported a missing bus and driver. For over a week, authorities searched with no success. Finally, 10 days after they had disappeared, the bus and driver were located in Miami, Florida. The driver said, "I'd had it with the cold weather, the passengers, and my family. One day after the last passenger got off, I thought, 'I wonder what would happen if I just took off driving.'" So that's what he did until he got to Florida, where he enjoyed the sun and the surf for over a week.

His discouragement had finally caught up with him. Of course, he now faced bigger concerns than discouragement! He would have been better off if he had taken his discouragement into the worship of a New York City Church rather than to the beaches of Miami!

Paul also tells us that because of the transforming presence of God, we:

## **#2: YOUR ACTIONS WILL BECOME LESS SHAMEFUL**

Look at verse 2:

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. (2 Corinthians 4:2a)

My summer job after graduation was as a helper to a local handyman named Louie. He knew my career path, so he would usually call me "Preacher boy." Louie was a nice guy. He taught me a lot. But he had a pretty foul mouth. I didn't grow up around that kind of language, so working with him was a bit of culture shock for me. I spent a lot of time praying about how to process that issue.

That summer we roofed a couple of houses, and being a novice roofer I would hit my thumb regularly. Ouch! Whenever I said that, Louie would respond in one of two ways:

1. It won't hurt if you hit the right nail.
2. Try cussing preacher boy. It will make the pain go away faster.

Every time he said that second one, I prayed that God would be with me on that roof. And then one day, Louie hit his thumb, and instead of cussing like he usually did, he said "Ouch." I can still picture the shock on his face as he accused me of being a bad influence on him.

That's the promise of today's Scripture. Right?

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory ... (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The more we hang out with God, the more we begin to resemble God. Our lives become like him. We always become like the company we keep.

- Which is why we as parents we monitor the friends our children have.

Finally, Paul also tells us that because of the transforming presence of God, we:

### **#3: YOUR TESTIMONY WILL BECOME MORE BOLD**

Look again at verse 2:

... by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 4:2b)

When Calvin Coolidge was still the governor of Massachusetts, he stopped by a local small town Fourth of July celebration. He had been campaigning all day and was hungry, so he went up to the table where a team of citizens was serving up homemade fried chicken. The lady behind the table cheerfully placed one piece of chicken on his plate.

"I would like to have two pieces please," Coolidge told her.

"I'm sorry," she said politely. "But we are giving only one piece to each person so that everyone is able to have a piece."

"Ma'am, do you know who I am?" Coolidge responded. "I am the governor of this state. I have been campaigning all day long. It's hot. I'm exhausted, and I'm hungry. I would like a second piece of chicken."

The lady paused a moment, then said: "Governor, do you know who I am? I'm the lady in charge of chicken. Now move along!"

The more time we spend in the presence of God, the bolder our faith becomes.

- A coward like Peter becomes the main preacher on the day of Pentecost because of the presence of God.
- A young fig farmer like Jeremiah becomes God's prophetic voice to a wicked nation because Jeremiah spent time in the presence of that same God.

The Scriptures teach that there will be a day – and we might already be in it – when we Christians will be called before the ruling authorities because of our faith.

But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:19-20)

And we will be able to do that because of the transforming power of God in our lives.

## **APPLICATION**

Charlie Simmons was the pastor of the Liberty Church, not far from Stockport, OH on the eastern side of the state. Charlie had an eighth grade education and, by his own admission, didn't even deserve to be promoted that far. Charlie was well known in that community because for most of his life Charlie was also the town drunk. When he was drinking, he was mean. And since he was always drinking, he was also the meanest man in town.

One Sunday, as he was sleeping off a night of drinking in the alley behind the local Nazarene Church, he was awakened by the sound of the church bells, signaling the start of worship. He wanted to tell them to stop making all that noise, but he was too drunk to get up. So he laid there, forced to listen as the congregation sang their hymns and the preacher proclaimed the gospel.

In that alley on that Sunday Charlie found himself in the presence of God and his life was changed. He stopped drinking. He even convinced the principal of the local school to give him a job as the night custodian ... on a temporary basis until he proved he could do it without drinking.

The change in Charlie was the talk of Stockport. Nobody could believe what they were seeing. But Charlie was different now. He was nice, and he was sober.

Liberty Church is a small country church – one of those churches that is often without a pastor because they really can't afford one. They were getting along by having people from the congregation share a simple testimony and some Scriptures each week. One week they invited Charlie to share his story. He did, and it had a powerful effect on that little church ... so much so they invited him back the next week, and the next week, and the next week ... until finally they just started calling him "Pastor Charlie."

I heard Charlie preach two times. Each time he begged me to preach instead of him that day, because he was embarrassed at his lack of education and polish. Each time I declined, and each time I was incredibly blessed by God's presence in Charlie's life and in that worship service.

There were some – including Charlie's own wife – who didn't think the changes in Charlie's life would last. To the best of my knowledge, she never heard Charlie preach because she didn't want to be humiliated when he reverted to his old drunken ways.

But Charlie had been transformed. He wasn't the old drunken Charlie any more. He was Pastor Charlie. All because of the presence of God.

Just watch as it happens to you.

Amen.

