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Title: Look Up - "Look Up for Freedom"

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

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Well, good morning. My name is Bryce Vaught, and it's my joy to serve on staff here as a part of the Adult Ministries Team. Let's pray together as we open today's scripture. Father, we thank you for the opportunity to gather together, to sit under your word, to be instructed, to be led, to be loved, and to be encouraged. And God, as we come through another week where we witness just the evil that's taking place in our world, the threat of evil in the days ahead, God, we pray for peace. We pray for the peace that only comes through knowing and believing your gospel, the gospel of your son. And it's in Jesus' name we pray these things. Amen.

There's a classic movie you may be familiar with called *The Shawshank Redemption*. It's considered one of the best movies of all time, a lot of people's favorite movie. If you haven't seen it, it's a movie about this man, Andy Dufresne, who is arrested for said to be a murderer. He's sentenced to two life sentences, and he claims he's innocent. The movie chronicles his experience in prison with the community there and follows his pursuit to find freedom and redemption.

And yet there's this interesting scene about halfway through the movie of another individual in the film whose name is Brooks. He's this older guy who was arrested at a pretty young age for a violent crime, and he's spent most of his life in prison. It's coming to the time where his sentence is about up and he's about to be free. And the reality is he doesn't want to be free. He wants to stay as all he knows is prison. His community is there. His purpose is there. He's the librarian of the prison. But he ends up being freed, given a job, and placed in a small apartment.

The movie follows his life for a couple of days and he's miserable. He's not sure what the world has come to. He doesn't know how to function in this freedom. And he ends up sadly taking his life in the film. It teaches an important lesson that I think is applicable today in that just because we've been freed from something doesn't necessarily mean that we automatically embrace everything that we've been freed to.

When we come to Second Corinthians, the church in Corinth is experiencing the threat of losing its freedom in Christ. When you come to Second Corinthians, to begin with, it's kind of like you're jumping in the middle of season four of this long-standing Netflix drama because the church in Corinth has been a mess, and there have been some really great highs.

But then there have been some low lows. There's been some drama and conflict. The apostle Paul made an appearance at this church and had painful visits with them, as well as moments of joy and restoration. And a lot of the issues in the church are slowly being resolved. But there's still this one lingering issue that the Apostle Paul needs to confront, namely that there is this small minority group in the church who is against Paul. They have sought to undermine his authority as an apostle, and part of it is because they don't like Paul's character. They have claimed that he lacks integrity, that he makes plans and then breaks them. He can't live up to

his promises. They say, man, he writes a really strong letter but when he comes in person, he's just really not that authoritative. And you don't really need to listen to him.

And, yes, they have a problem with the Apostle Paul himself. But more than anything else, they have a problem with the message that Paul proclaims. Namely, again, their issue is that they claim that the Apostle Paul is against the law of God. They say he preaches this grace, and they claim that he's just completely neglected the Old Covenant testimony. And that's an issue because the Old Testament is how we relate with God. In the Old Testament, the Old Covenant Law, they said that's where life and death are, and you can't get rid of it. And so, they're seeking to undermine Paul's message by saying he's just against the law.

The Apostle Paul has to refute this argument, and he does so by saying, look, I'm not against the law. The law came with glory, came with more glory than we could ever imagine. And so, he spent some time pointing back to the moment that the law was given to the Israelites, that we see this story take place in the Book of Exodus, that as God's people had been in slavery for 400 years in Egypt, God shows up to them and hears their cry, and he miraculously delivers the Israelites through the ten plagues and leads them through the sea into the wilderness.

And he brings this great multitude to Mount Sinai. This is a pivotal moment that if you want to understand the rest of the Old Testament, you have to go back to this moment because it's at this time that Moses was called up to the mountain of God, Mount Sinai, to meet with God, to receive the Old Testament to this covenant. God speaks to the Israelites saying, look, you've seen what I've done, how I've delivered you from Egypt. Now hear these words. I will be your God and you will be my people if you agree to live to this standard. To which the Israelites, having just been freed by this amazing God, speak back and say everything you command we will do.

So, God calls Moses up the mountain, and he gives them the Ten Commandments, the law of God. This is life and death. There's blessing and obedience. There's a curse and there's death and disobedience. We see that Moses is filled with this glory of God to the point where after Moses spends some intimate time with God, we see that the Scriptures even affirm that God spoke with Moses face to face as if God was speaking with a friend. That the glory of God led to this deep, experiential intimacy with Him. But it also resulted in Moses imaging God's glory to the people. Scriptures tell us later on, and I think it's Exodus 34-35 that after Moses comes down off the mountain, his face was so radiant because of the glory of God in his midst that He had to veil his face because he was so beautiful.

The law is good. The Apostle Paul isn't against the law. He affirms that it came with great glory. It's important to know, too, that everyone who's ever lived has functioned and operated under the law. We may not necessarily affirm this outwardly, sometimes, but we are for laws. We want to have good laws that promote a safe lifestyle that's beneficial. Every government that's ever existed has enacted some level of law to promote social welfare and goodness.

The place of business that you work at has a code of conduct. We have that here at Orchard Hill. We want to win with people. Businesses enact codes of conduct so that everyone functions on the same page, works together in harmony, and gets things done in an efficient

manner. Another one of our codes here at Orchard Hill is that we have this thing we want to respond to every email as best we can within the same day.

We have these rules in place that we do this in our families, that whether verbally or non-verbally, we communicate traditions within our family of this is what it means to be a good person, and this is what it means to be a bad person. We do this in our religious traditions and communicate traditions and ways of living that are good and not so good. We live personally by deep convictions. This is what it means to be a good person. This is what it looks like to be a bad person. We function every day by law.

The point that the Apostle Paul is trying to make to this minority group in the Corinthian church is that he's not against the law of God. In another passage of Scripture in Romans, he refers to the Old Testament law as being holy and righteous and good. He's for the law. He's just for the law being used in the way it was intended to be used. In other words, the whole reason that God revealed the Old Testament law was it served two purposes.

One, it revealed the glory and the holiness of God. The Old Testament Covenant revealed that this is the standard of righteousness that were called to, that God is holy, he's powerful, and he's beautiful. It also reveals or is meant to reveal that we fall short of that standard, that yes, the law is good, but it has a high demand. It demands perfection. It demands that we live up to it constantly. It demands wholehearted allegiance.

What the law in the Old Testament did was it revealed God's glory, but it could not reproduce God's glory. And it leads to a life that is miserable. In fact, the Old Testament Covenant leads to no life at all. The issue is when we try to rely upon the law for something it wasn't meant to provide. In fact, this kind of reliance upon a law leads to a frustrating life.

The Apostle Paul speaks to this in Romans chapter seven. This passage may be familiar. It's often referred to, to communicate the struggle that believers have with sin. And certainly, you can use this passage to apply to that experience. But really, the context of Romans seven is the frustration of relying upon the law to provide something that it can't.

So, the Apostle Paul speaks in Romans chapter seven, verse 15. He says this. "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

So again, he is pointing to this frustration. There are a lot of commentaries and scholars who will review this passage and they're like who's really the Apostle Paul talking about? Is he talking about himself? Is this his personal experience with sin? Is he talking about a hypothetical person? But again, the context of Romans seven is our need to be freed from the law, and the person that the Apostle Paul is referring to in the passage we just read is any person who is living in this deep reliance upon the law to try to control sin and maintain a right relationship with God.

It leads to nothing but frustration because you can't do it. You can't earn the right relationship with God through obedience. You can't maintain your good standing in God's presence by

being perfectly obedient. But the problem is it demands perfect obedience. You can't just quit on the law. You can't just cancel it. It's there and it's not going anywhere. Even Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away but my word, the law, is eternal.

So, what are we going to do with it? Towards the end of chapter seven, the Apostle Paul makes this statement. He says, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" In other words, he's confessing that because he can't live up to this standard, he deserves death. And we are in a situation that is hopeless. And that's why he starts off the passage that we just read saying that the ministry of glory, the glory of the Old Testament, is nothing but a ministry of death. We need something new. And that's why we need and hope in the New Covenant.

The covenant that Jesus enacted the night before his crucifixion. As he's there with his disciples, he takes the bread and breaks it, saying this is my body. He takes the wine and says this is my blood. In other words, everything that the Old Testament, the Old Covenant Law demanded is supplied in Jesus. It demanded perfect righteousness and perfect obedience. And Jesus provided it. It demanded a sacrifice on our behalf. And He provided that so that now we can appropriately use the law in the way it was intended to. We can see God's glory through it, but we don't have to live in this constant reliance upon obedience in order to determine whether we're accepted by God or not.

That's the Apostle Paul's message. That's our message today, that we don't have to rely on the Old Testament law. We don't have to measure God's acceptance of us based on how well we are living up to the tradition of even our own religious standards. God's not pleased with you because you read the Bible more than you used to. He's pleased with you because of what Christ has provided on the cross. God is pleased with you and the law is good. But it's not how you earn right-standing before God. It's in this new covenant.

And that's why he starts Romans chapter eight saying, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death." As believers, we have been set free. We've been set free from sin. We've been set free from this reliance upon the law of God to earn our right standing. We've been set free from death, and yet we can't just meditate on what we've been set free from because then we'll just be like Brooks in *The Shawshank Redemption*. My fear is that for a lot of believers, a lot of Christians, we know what we've been set free from. We've been freed from sin. And that's a great news. But oftentimes we don't fully embrace what we've been free to. And that's what Paul is again writing to the Corinthian church here in chapter three. He says we're not like Moses. In verse 12, "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses..." As believers, we're not like Brooks in *The Shawshank Redemption* in that we are miserable, not really understanding what we've been freed to.

This isn't going to be an exhaustive list, but I think from this passage there are at least three things that we can rejoice in that we've been freed to. First, is that we've been freed to a new mind. In verse 14, Moses is the apostle. Paul is speaking. He says, "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." In other words, we see that the Old Covenant living in this reliance and the burden of some of the Old Covenant, dulled the

minds of the Old Testament believers. Paul is writing to affirm that as believers in the New Covenant, we've been freed to a new mind.

For better or worse, we live in a society where we tend to attribute all of our personal flaws and inadequacies to psychological problems. So, to the point when we go through a season of anxiety or depression or just being really obsessed with something, we tend to think, man, all these problems are just in my head that if I could just get my thoughts under control if I could get my mind healthy, then my life would be radically changed.

And there's some truth to that fact. There's this scholar, this doctor, Dr. Daniel Amen, who recently wrote a book called *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*. It's an older book. He wrote it about the time that new technology was making brain scans much more readable and available for study. And based on his research, he was like, look, a lot of our issues that we think are psychological issues, are really physiological issues. In other words, his research has affirmed that as a human race, our brains do not function to the potential that they are really created for and that our minds are fallen.

The Bible even speaks to this. Romans one says that because of our sinful nature, we have been given over to a debased or depraved mind. And so, in this book that Dr. Amen writes, he makes his argument. Then for the rest of the book, he puts together this program of how you can change your brain patterns and how you can make your brain healthier. It includes a lot of good advice that talks about a healthy diet and exercise and good practices to create peaceful thoughts and clear thinking. There's some merit to it. It's really good advice, but it's not good news. As people, we don't just need a better mind that functions a little bit better. We need a new mind. We need a mind that's free. We need a mind that can be creative. That is filled with truth and hope. We need a mind that only the New Covenant can produce.

The Apostle Paul said that the Old Testament believers, their minds, were dull under the Old Covenant. In other words, all they could think about is this is what I have to do in order for God to be pleased with me. So, they were constantly thinking this is what I can do. This is what I can't do. Their minds were very narrow. And only through Christ is that taken away.

In other words, under the New Covenant, instead of approaching the Scriptures with this mentality of this is what I have to do for God to be pleased with me, we as believers can approach every verse with the thought this is what God has done in Christ on my behalf. So that now He's pleased with me. Our minds don't have to remain dull, burdened, or hardened. They're now moldable. They're now teachable. It can now receive grace so that we can grow and flourish with a healthy thought life, a mind that's filled with the spirit of God, and a mind that is set on heavenly things. A mind that considers our neighbors more than we consider our own self. A mind that is set free in Christ.

It doesn't stop there. I think we've all been in situations or can look back on our lives and we can know we have this understanding that we knew the right thing to do. I had the right understanding. But for some reason, I still couldn't follow through with what I knew was right. We don't just need a new mind. We also need a new heart. Apostle Paul makes this statement and this passage as well. He's saying that it has been removed, the veil has been removed in Christ. And he says even to this day when Moses has read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Part of the New

Covenant promises that we have been given a new heart. The heart in Scripture is really often considered to be the seat of our emotions or will. It's the very center of who we are that if we're going to function in this new covenant, we don't just need a new mind that understands God's law. We need a heart that desires God's law.

One very imperfect illustration is just this example of let's say you have a young single woman who begins to work for a really big flourishing company. Her office is on the same level as the main boss, the one who leads the whole company. She's down the hall and has never met the boss. She just sees this big corner office that the boss sits in, and it seems really glorious. Now, outside of his office, there's this bulletin board with the company's values and the daily responsibilities and tasks that need to be completed. We might ask, well, how might she feel about the boss that she works for? How might she feel about the rules and the instructions that have been given on a daily basis? She might respect them. She might understand them. She might do her best to follow through with them. But there's probably going to be some distance, a coldness maybe towards the boss that she doesn't know.

Now, let's move ahead. Several months later, she meets this boss, comes to know the boss's heart, and sees his kindness, generosity, and compassion. Let's say that this boss is also single, that they begin to fall in love, and that they're married. They still work together in the same company eight years down the road. How does she view the laws now? She doesn't have a cold feeling. She understands the boss's heart. She knows who this man is. And instead of just obeying them out of this sense of responsibility, she now obeys them out of this sense of devotion.

Now, that is a very imperfect story that completely ignores the complexities of dating your boss. All right, so just go with it. But the hope and it really does illustrate somewhat of the Christian message, is that we don't just follow God's word, his truth, and his law because we understand them, but we begin to walk in obedience because we love him. This kind of glory has captured our hearts and our imagination. So now we desire to obey him.

Lastly, we've been freed to a new mind. We've been freed to a new heart. And we've been freed to new, eternal glory. The Apostle Paul finishes this passage with this. He says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and 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, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

So, I just want to start. What even is glory? We hear that word used. It's kind of a churchy word and honestly, it's a word for someone who loves to study scripture, it's a hard word to even communicate what it really means. In Hebrew, it's just weightiness and fullness. It's *Kabod*. It's the weightiness of God at the fullness of his personality, his attributes, and his being on display for us to see and know.

And just like the example of Moses, it's meant to lead to this deeper intimacy with him, but it should also result in us being transformed to represent His glory. And so, the Apostle Paul says we've been freed to this new glory by the spirit who is ever-increasing glory in our lives. The thing is, in the Old Testament, God's glory was there one minute, and it was gone the next. We see that God's glory was revealed on Mount Sinai in the life of Moses. But in First Samuel chapter four, we see a tragic story where the ark is taken away from Israel. And the

story ends with this confession that the glory of God has departed. It's no longer there. Then we see after this eventually, Solomon takes the throne and builds the Temple of God, where the glory of God fills the temple for the whole nation to see this amazing moment. But then, generations later, we see that the temple is destroyed. And again, the glory of God is absent. When you come to the end of the Old Testament, they're back in the land and the temple is there. But it's just not up to the standard of glory that we know and see in Solomon. So, the Old Testament believers are left wondering when they will see God's glory again.

The Apostle John, as he is reflecting on the life and ministry of Jesus, opens his gospel with these words. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen His glory. The glory of the only Son from the Father. What makes the New Covenant, the New Testament, this new promise so much more glorious than the Old Covenant? Because the glory of God is now permanent in Christ. Part of the role of the Holy Spirit, as we've been given the Spirit who dwells in us, is that He fixes our eyes on Jesus Christ. And we behold him, we contemplate him, and we consider him. And over the course of our lives, the Spirit transforms us and renews us to the image of the Son so that our life will reproduce the glory of God to an ever-increasing degree. We've not just been freed from the law. We've not just been freed from sin and death. We've been freed to a new mind, a new heart, and new glory.

Let's pray, Heavenly Father, we thank you. And we just want to sit and consider what you have done through Christ. Father, I pray that as we go about this week, the Spirit will help us to behold the person and work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, the hope that we have in Him, and that we will live a bold life filled with courage, strength, and grace. And that we would just radiate that glory in our daily existence, workplace, families, homes, and wherever we go, that we would experience the freedom that you provide in Jesus. It's in His name we pray. Amen. Thank you. We'll see you next time.