



SERMONS

Behind the Mask: Getting Real We Are Crackpots

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

October 11, 2020

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Welcome to worship, whether in person or on-line. I have some great news for you! Our in-person attendance is growing. Of course there are some for whom it is not yet safe to venture out, but more and more ARE returning...and we need to add a third service in order to comply with state restrictions. Next week, our services will be 8:30, Classic; and 10:00 and 11:30, Modern. Obviously, we need to spread our numbers out in order to make best use of this time. So...we are going to do a very scientific distribution right now. If you plan on worshipping at 10:00, please raise your hand. Now, 11:30. OK...we've got this balanced out. Could you do us a favor and commit to that service until the end of the year? This will allow us to provide a safer environment for those who are longing to be together in the flesh.

We continue in our series on 2 Corinthians called "Behind the Mask: Getting Real. One of the surprising things Paul's letter reveals to us... is that Moses struggled with a touch of spiritual pride. When he was on Mt. Sinai, God's awesome presence (we call that his 'Glory') was so brilliant that it made Moses' face shine like the sun. When people saw him, it freaked them out...so Moses had to put on a mask. But after a while, Moses' shininess began to fade... yet he kept the mask on to pretend he was still glowing. To pretend he was more spiritual than he really was!

It's easy to be like Moses, isn't it? To pretend to be something we are not; to try to look holy for those we want to impress. That pretense can be exhausting. But the



good news is, when we invite the Holy Spirit to remove our masks, we are emancipated! “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom,” says Paul. I met with a dear friend this week who, after decades of pretending, finally came clean about his addictions. It is such a relief for him to be able to walk in authenticity...and his healing has begun.

But mask-wearing doesn't just impact the way people look at us. It impacts the way WE look at life. Have you discovered that when you wear your COVID mask, it actually impairs, not only your speech, but your vision? I've had people walk right out in front of my car in a parking lot...and I really think it was because the mask blocked their sight.

Paul says, “Rip that spiritual mask off. Not only are you living a lie...your mask actually PREVENTS you from seeing God clearly.” When we are so concerned with covering UP what is wrong about us, we miss out on what God wants to do in us. Heal what is hurt, clean up what is dirty, forgive what is shameful, strengthen what is weak. When we renounce hypocrisy...when we rip off our spiritual masks...THAT'S when God can do his greatest work in us and through us. Paul says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” 2 Cor 3:18

I love that promise. This means that every day, bit by bit, the Holy Spirit is transforming me to be more like Jesus. This is a miraculous work of creation...just like when God created the universe back in Genesis 1. In fact, that's what Paul refers to when he says, “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

When we tear off the spiritual masks behind which we hide, not only do we live more authentically...it allows more of the life-giving power of Jesus to enter us. It is so



important to understand this: when we stop pretending to be religious and, instead, open ourselves up completely to God...the very power that created the universe...the very power that raised Jesus from death to life...that power...that glory...lives inside us. Do you believe that? Do you receive that? You are a repository of the greatest treasure of all time...the transforming glory of God.

This is our safe. In it, we keep our weapons, our important papers, a little cash and our treasures. We don't have many treasures...but those few things that are precious to us, we keep inside this safe. Because it is solid, secure, fireproof...

Now...if you were given the greatest treasure of all time...the glory of God...the awesome presence of Almighty God...where would you store THAT? What is the container in which we store the life-giving, life-changing glory of God? THIS! (JAR) Listen to what Paul says in 2 Cor 4:7.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

(16)...So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

This is a jar of clay. It is modest. Unimpressive. Fragile. And this is what Paul uses to describe us! This is who we are in our own strength. If we are really honest about our past, there are lots of reasons we would be disqualified from doing anything

significant for God. And yet, Paul says that into these modest, unimpressive, fragile containers, God deposits the greatest of all treasures. Himself! His Holy Spirit. His glory. His transforming power and life. If you belong to Jesus...no matter what you look like on the outside...no matter how rough or common or unimpressive you appear, the glory of God dwells within you.

And it is for this reason that Paul almost seems to speak out of both sides of his mouth. What do I mean? Well...a couple of pages ago he was talking about how harshly he had been persecuted...how terribly he had suffered. Remember? For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. 2 Cor. 1:8-9.

But now, he calls all that he has experienced a “light momentary affliction.” “Persecution? Meh...just a passing annoyance.” So...which is it? How could he say that his sufferings were a death sentence...and then say that they are just an irritation? Because...Paul remembered the treasure inside his clay jar. He remembered the power that lives within him. He remembered that it is God who carries him through his times of suffering and, because it so obviously requires more strength than Paul possessed...it was God alone who would receive the glory...the credit for it.

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Pastor Ellis spoke recently about the importance of perspective. And Paul has gained perspective...by turning his eyes away from his afflictions and onto God. “...we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal...”



Last week we prayed for President Trump and others in his circle who had tested positive for COVID. Our prayers were answered it seems. But he tweeted out something that has caused a firestorm of controversy: "Don't be afraid of COVID. Don't let it dominate your life." Some criticized him for this given that over 210,000 Americans have died from COVID. "WE OUGHT to be afraid of such a disease," they protested! And if the president was saying that we ought not be cautious, prudent or vigilant in fighting this disease... that WOULD be irresponsible.

But I don't think that's what he was saying. I think he was saying "Don't live in fear." And at a time when our nation is terrified, this is an important message. We ARE living in fear. One side lives in fear of losing their health; the other side lives in fear of losing their liberties. These things which we put our security in...they feel like they are being taken from us. And so, as a nation, we ARE living in fear. Because, as Paul would put it, we have set our sight on the externals of this life. The circumstances of life beyond our control. We are focused on these clay jars; on protecting and preserving our fragile physical existence. And you know the problem with that? As Paul put it, "...our outer self is wasting away." Or, to put it more succinctly... (DROP JAR.)

Ultimately, this is what will happen to every one of these jars of clay. And of course, if our focus is on this life...these bodies...the treasures and security of this world...then the future is terrifying. But Paul says, "Don't focus on what is transient. Focus on what is eternal." Later in chapter 5 Paul says it this way, "Walk by faith, not by sight."

And here's what is most astounding of all. (PICK UP SHARDS) The more broken our lives...the more cracked our pots...the more God's glory and power is able to shine through us and work through us...even in really difficult times. Like right now!

My sweetheart, Cyndi, lived in Japan for a period of time. Her beloved Grandma Margaret, knowing of Cyndi's passion for Japan, presented her with this: a Lladro



Japanese girl. A lovely, thoughtful and expensive gift. Cyndi is not much of a knickknack person, but for all our marriage, this has been on display in our home.

That is, until Cooper became a teenager. He was horsing around one day and the Lladro was knocked to the ground...and its head snapped off. Cyndi was devastated...and furious. Cooper's punishment was to go to work and make \$350 to replace what was obviously irreplaceable. And after several months, he raised enough money.

But one day our daughter Rachel said to her mom, "Why haven't you replaced your Lladro?" Cyndi said, "Because it's just not the same. That was a gift from my grandma; that's what made it precious." So...Rachel did a nationwide search to find an artisan who repairs Lladros...and sent the pieces off to her. It cost nearly as much as a replacement would have cost. This woman worked her magic and Rachel and Cooper gave it to Cyndi for her birthday.

It is the most precious gift Cyndi ever received. It sits proudly on our mantle. Because Cyndi preferred the real thing...the original...a precious gift from her grandma, cracks and all...to a flawless replacement.

Astoundingly, this is God's opinion of us, too. He knows we are fallible, flawed individuals. He knows there's stuff in our background that ought to disqualify us from ministry. He knows we are crackpots...but he loves us still. He uses us still. He would rather repair what is broken... than start over. Because every time one of our cracks is visible...and the light of his glory shines through...it is a reminder of HIS goodness, HIS mercy, HIS grace, HIS re-creative power.

You are crackpots. All of you! And God adores you. He has poured his Spirit into every one of your lives...he is putting back together your broken pieces...and he is shining through every imperfection, a reminder of the great treasure that lives within



us. Set your eyes on that! Keep your focus on Jesus. Especially in these hard times. Then you will join with Paul in saying, as The Message puts it, "We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken."