

BEHIND OUR MASK?

Genesis 27:1-8, (explain the story between these verses) 18-23 (explain the rest of the story after these verses)

Illustration - “false radiation story” and then true “radiation story”

Unless you’re in the medical field or you’ve had radiation, you did not know which of my “radiation stories” was true...I was “masking” the real radiation story with a “false radiation story.”

Did you know we do this all the time? We wear masks and we hide the real “us”

A man in the Old Testament named Jacob wore a mask too. His mask was a literal disguise to deceive his father, Isaac, into giving him the Hebrew blessing that was given before the father’s death to the first born and oldest brother, Esau.

But it was also a spiritual mask that he wore that day because Jacob was portraying to his father that he was “honest” when actually he was a “deceiver” in his heart.

The name “Jacob” actually means “subplanter or deceiver.” He tried to wear an “honesty mask” but behind it was a true deceiver.

Jacob’s true self behind his mask... “the deceiver” came back to haunt him throughout his life...

When he found a beautiful girl to marry from his kindred, named Rachel, and he worked 7 years for her hand, his father-in-law deceived him into marrying her older sister, Leah. The Bible says “Leah was tender eyed....that means “not-so-pretty” (it’s like ordering a steak but getting a tofu chop)

Jacob had to work 7 more years to get Rachel as his second wife. The “deceiver” becomes the “deceived.”

(This “multiple wives” issue was allowed in the Old Testament, but don’t think for a second that just because God allowed things in different times that He approves of them! God permits things sometimes because He has a plan we don’t understand and He will always work things out to our ultimate good and His ultimate glory)

Later, Jacob’s family begins to grow and he winds up with 2 wives, 2 handmaids, and 11 boys! Jacob wants to leave and make his own home but Laban wants him to stay. Jacob makes an “honest deal” with his father-in-law to stay on the ranch if he’ll let him have all the speckled and spotted sheep that are bred from then on. Laban thinks he’s getting a deal because the spotted and speckled sheep were inferior so he agrees. Jacob uses a deceitful plan involving putting striped sticks in front of the strongest sheep and causing them to conceive speckled and spotted lambs, which would now belong to Jacob. He’s wearing that “honesty mask” but behind the mask he’s still Jacob...the deceiver.

Jacob’s true self behind the mask...“the deceiver”, also hurts his family...

When Jacob does finally leave his father-in-law, Laban discovers an idol missing and goes after Jacob and his family accusing one of them of stealing it. They search the whole group, but Rachel gives an excuse for not getting up off her camel's furniture (I think you can buy that on-line through Pier One Imports) and they let her by but she in reality had stolen the idol and hidden it in her stuff. She watched her husband wear an "honesty mask" but yet truly be a deceiver and now she does it.

BUT IT DOESN'T STOP THERE...

Years later, Jacob's sons have grown up and Jacob has a son in his old age named Joseph. He loves and favors Joseph more than the rest of his children, even to the point of making him a special coat of many colors, which causes great jealousy. Joseph also has a gift from God of interpreting dreams, which makes him even more hated by his brethren. They conspire first to kill Joseph but then sell him into slavery and take that multi-colored coat and change it to one color....red! They tear it and dip it in animal blood and deceive their father into thinking Joseph was attacked and killed by a wild animal. They watched their Dad wear an "honesty mask" but yet truly be a deceiver and now they are doing it!

And did you ever stop to think that ALL this is written down in the Bible and we're still reading about Jacob, the "deceiver" thousands of years later?

THIS IS THE PROBLEM WITH WEARING A MASK...OUR TRUE SELF IS STILL THERE BEHIND THE MASK AND OUR FAMILY AND OTHERS SEE IT BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY...GOD KNOWS WHAT'S BEHIND OUR MASK! AND IT IS GOD THAT WE WILL FACE ONE DAY WITH OUR TRUE SELF AND BE JUDGED BASED ON WHO WE REALLY ARE, NOT WHO WE THINK WE ARE OR OTHERS THINK WE ARE.

It's time to remove the mask.
It's time to be transparent.
It's time to get real with God and others.

Now who is it that you are telling yourself and others you are but yet behind your mask, you are something completely different?

1. Are you wearing a mask of RELIGION today to get to Heaven?

John 3:1 "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:"
Here is a religious man. He is not just mildly religious...he is a member of the main religious councils of the Jews in Jesus' day. He knew the Law. He practiced the Law. He judged others according to the Law. When you heard the name "Nicodemus" you said, "That's a religious man!"

BUT LOOK WHAT JESUS DOES with Nicodemus's mask of "religion"

John 3:2-7 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

Jesus strips Nicodemus's "religious" mask away and reveals a sinner beneath his mask in need of salvation. He says, "YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN" – that's YOU...Mr.Nicodemus

And then Jesus strips off the "religious mask" from the rest of us. He says, "EXCEPT A MAN (that's all of us) BE BORN OF WATER (that's your physical birth, a reference to the womb) AND OF THE SPIRIT (That's just another way of saying "born again" or "spiritually born into God's family)

ALL OF US are born sinners. We may try and put on some "religion", some "good works" and that old line "I'm a good person, I know God will let me in Heaven" BUT BEHIND OUR MASK is a sinner in need of salvation.

The Bible is clear who we all really are behind our mask –
Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

And the Bible offers the ONLY cure for our condition
Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

It's time to throw away the mask of religion and see ourselves as the sinners we are without Christ and let Him save us when we put our faith in Him!

2. Are you wearing a mask of "HOLINESS" today to impress God and others?

Acts 5:1-11 "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter

said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”

Here is a couple who were trying to impress the early church by wearing a mask of “outward holiness” when behind the mask, they were inwardly dishonest, untruthful, insincere, phony, and just plain sinful!

Now, we know that God knew who this couple was behind their mask – He knows everything about us. We can’t hide anything from Him. But in this instance, God allowed Peter to see behind the mask Ananias and Sapphira were wearing.

Peter was an Apostle. Apostles were endued with special gifts in the New Testament. God granted Peter the gift of discernment. Peter discerned that this couple was not telling the truth about their property deal and their gift to the church. First, God allowed Peter to strip away the husband’s mask in verse 3 and then, God allowed Peter to strip away the wife’s mask in verse 9. The result was drastic...God killed them both right there on the spot! God isn’t necessarily doing it that way in our day, though He does warn us in 1 John about a “sin unto death,” He generally doesn’t take people out for wearing a “holiness” mask to impress Him and others.

God desires we be holy, which means “living a life that is godly and pleasing to the Lord.” We could also say that being holy is “Living a life like Jesus – a life that matches the example of Jesus Christ in the Bible.”

“Holiness” is more than what we project on the outside. We can convince people we are Holy by doing things that are considered “holy.” We are always at church, we are big givers, we sing in the choir, we take the offering (by “take” I mean you “take it up and leave it here at the church...not “take it”), we teach in the Sunday School, we serve in the nursery, we give out personal loans or do personal favors for members in need, we work in the rescue mission, the homeless shelter, the nursing home or the prison ministry, we go to the mall and pass out gospel tracts, we give out hams and turkeys at holidays, we never have a cross word with anyone and exude a sweet, smiling countenance at all times.

NOW ALL OF THESE THINGS ARE GOOD AND RIGHT AND CAN BE A REFLECTION OF HOLINESS, but true holiness has to start in the heart! It flows from the inside out.

You can do ALL of the things I mentioned and still be wearing a mask. Others may not know it, but God sees behind our mask. He knows if we are REAL because He knows our hearts.

1 Samuel 16:7 God said to Samuel when he was sent to anoint a king from Jesse’s sons: “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

True holiness is letting God have ALL your heart. Letting Him take possession of EVERY part of your life. Falling before Him and crying out like David in Psalms 139:23 and 24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Let God search you completely today. Let Him try your motives behind your dreams, let Him test your plans you’ve made, let Him examine your ambitions and your drive for doing what you do, let Him scrutinize your reasoning behind decisions you make or you’re making, let Him analyze the intentions of your heart in all things...are you doing what you do and acting like you’re acting for your glory and to impress others or for His glory and to please Him alone?

God will purify us if we put ourselves at His feet and let Him break us and then remake us the way He wants us to be. He loves a yielded, submitted, humbled heart...

Psalms 34:18 says, “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

Psalms 26:2 says, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.”

THIS IS THE KEY...let the Lord have your heart and lead you to be like Him from the inside out. Then our outward mask is the same as our inward mask...in fact, there’s no mask...we are real. We are on the outside what we are on the inside.

3. Are You Wearing a mask of “PERSONAL STRENGTH” today to project an image of perfection and power to God and others?

Matthew 26:31- 35 tells us of an event that took place before Jesus was arrested and crucified. He was spending some last moments with His disciples and He prophesied that all of them would flee once He was arrested. Now, Peter, who was known as the “strong disciple” would not be included in this prophecy...

The Bible tells us: “Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.”

You know the story. It happened just like Jesus said. They all scattered like fearful rats. Peter was the weakest...he denied the Lord three times! The “strong disciple” was in fact “the weakest link.”

I’m afraid we’re a lot like Peter today. We want everyone to think we’re strong and we’re wearing this mask of “personal strength.” We think it’s a failure to show weakness. We think it’s a disappointment to others if they see we have faults, flaws and frailties. We think that we’re letting people down if they see we have any limitations in life. WE THINK IT’S WEAK TO SHOW WEAKNESS.

And so, we wear a mask of “personal strength” and project an image that we have no problems, we have a perfect life, we can do anything we want to do, we have the power to overcome any obstacles, we are strong, we are a rock, we will never give in to weakness.

It’s a dangerous mask to wear. We are weak without God and we need to realize that! We have no strength that He did not give us. We have no power outside of Him. We are only as strong as God allows.

I know about Bill Gates, Sam Walton, Martha Stewart, Oprah, and the “Donald” but that is only strength for this world. Their successes and wealth and power are only down here...unless they are believers and they are truly letting God give them strength and not relying on their own strength.

The believer is different. He not only lives in this world, he lives for the next world. Everything we do is to be for the Lord. If we are to show strength to others to help and encourage them, it is NOT to be our strength, but God’s strength through us.

2 Timothy 1:7 says, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

God wants to show His strength through us and this way He will get the glory and not us. But there is something you must know. Before God can fully and truly show His strength through us...we have to become weak.

We have to let Him strip away the mask of our own “personal strength” and show others that we are weak without Him.

Paul learned this lesson when he got sick and God did not answer his prayer to take his sickness away but instead allowed him to keep it and learn to rejoice in it.

2 Corinthians 12: 9 and 10 Paul confesses, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

I’ve had to learn this lesson too and I didn’t like it. I prided myself on my personal strength as a Christian man. I projected an image of a strong husband, a strong father, a strong disciplinarian who lost the weight he wanted to, and a strong pastor of a growing church who had no weaknesses, no problems, no flaws...only strength!

Cancer changed all that! It tore my mask away. I’ve realized I am weak, I am powerless without the Lord, I am full of flaws, I am frail, and I am not strong at all!

I’ve had to accept that I can’t do what I’ve done all these years, I can’t go on a long day with my wife and just date all day long...you know start with breakfast and spend the whole day together and end with a dinner date, I can’t wrestle with my boys and help build the tree house, I can’t

hold my baby too long, I can't mow my lawn or clean my pool right now, I can't sing in the church music too much, I can't work in the church office a full day, I can't visit our people and perform the weddings and funerals, I can't stay after the services every time and hug necks and shake hands because the preaching wears me out, I just can't be all I want to be right now. The mask is gone!

I am nothing apart from God. The strength you see is God...NOT ME! The faith we have chosen as a family is faith in HIM...not ourselves! And it's good to be weak in His sight because this is when HE can show HIS STRENGTH best!

Now, how about YOU? Are you wearing the mask I was wearing? Have you been projecting an image of "personal strength" when deep within you know that behind the mask is a weak, powerless person without God's power?

Have you been projecting the image of a perfect marriage, a perfect parent, a perfect teenager, a perfect Christian, a successful businessman, a gifted servant, the one "every one likes", a problem-free, self-reliant, never-weak, always strong person?

But you and God know the truth. It's a mask and inside you're weak. You're scared of failure. You're fearful of rejection. You're insecure about people knowing you too closely and learning you're not all you seem. You're afraid people will discover you are not perfect, but instead you have weaknesses.

Let the Lord tear away your mask of "personal strength" today. You don't have to stand up and declare how weak you are...just begin letting Him be your strength like Paul. Others will see it without you telling them.

I MET GOD IN THE MORNING

**I met God in the morning
When the day was at its best
And His presence came like glory
With His sunrise on my breast
All day long His presence lingered
All day long He stayed with me
And we sailed in perfect calmness
On a very troubled sea
Other ships were torn and battered
Other ships were sore distressed
But the winds that seemed to drive them
Brought to me a peace and rest
Then I thought of other mornings
And there came remorse of mind
When I too had left the blessing
Of His presence far behind
So I think I've learned the secret
For many a troubled way
If you meet God in the morning
You can have Him all the day**

How about it? Are you ready to get rid of that mask?

Will you stop depending on religion to take you to Heaven and admit we're sinners and we need to trust Jesus as our Savior and will you come to Him today?

Will you stop acting holy on the outside and let God get hold of your heart and have complete control of everything?

Will you stop projecting your own personal strength and admit to God you're weak and you need Him to show His strength in you?

It's your mask...it's your decision.