

THE MASQUERADE

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Protea Valley Family Church, Cape Town,
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NOTE: The song "Stained Glass Masquerade" by Casting Crowns was played in church as part of this sermon and we suggest you listen to it as it will give you great insight into the message. You can listen to this song on the Internet by going to:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYAEc8A0kk8>

I heard that song for the first time on Tuesday morning on the way to College and the Lord opened my eyes to His beloved Church and His sadness to what is happening in her. For me the song speaks powerfully to the all "too human" desire to not be genuine within the church the world over so that the congregants within them (who are also not being genuine) will not think less of us.

There are a few interesting quotes by some pretty influential theologians that I thought we would share;

"There is no salvation outside the church". We need to ask ourselves, is there any salvation within the Church these days?

"A church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints." So true isn't it? A museum to me deals with things that aren't living, dead.

"Absolutely nothing will revitalise the church faster than rediscovering its purpose." Rick Warren – The Purpose Driven Life.

For the church (us) to have an impact in the world, we have to be genuine, we have to be real, and we have to be authentic. Like you, I am tired of the deceit. I am tired of the masks we have to wear.

We, the body of Christ (the church), have to be real to work as it was designed. It is up to us, you and I, to have the courage to be completely and utterly transparent, and promote that. The message is pretty simple. John's strategy in **1 John 4: 11 – 21** says;

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we

have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

I don't know about you, but I am committed to dropping the masquerades, and having the Church (that is you, and I) remove the masks we hide behind and be real. That's the deal. The song you have just heard tackles the shallowness of many of us who act like we are perfect people when we are around Christians. It's a trait I recognize too in my own life, and think I need to really take to heart the challenge presented in the song.

In truth it has nothing to do with what's happening on the outside of us, but it comes straight from the heart. It involves stripping all the religion away and dealing with the issues of the heart. It's about fear, it's about faith, and it's about being able to trust God with something when it's not going the right way, and how to have peace with Him knowing that He alone has the ability to change, and shape things.

Romans 4 gives us a view of two men, Abraham and David. Paul quotes the Psalm David wrote upon knowing the intense forgiveness of God, after a time of hidden sin. For, at least, nine months, David had hidden his sins which were adultery, and murder. Now, this was the man after God's own heart!

And yet, he'd stumbled, and he had fallen. But rather than admit his sins, what did he do? He hid them. Shame, guilt, fear, desire, whatever it was, he couldn't admit that he had been wrong. Not before anyone.

He describes it in **Psalm 32: 3 - 5** this way: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. " Selah

David felt as though he was no longer after God's own heart. Instead he hid his own and tried to forget the past that was killing him. Until God tackled him head on. David confessed, and though he still faced the consequences of his sin, God forgave him.

Verses 1 and 2 actually describe his great freedom afterwards. He says; "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose **spirit is no deceit.**"

Whose transgressions are forgiven? Whose sins are covered? Not hidden away, but covered by the mercy of God. In whose spirit is no deceit? Can you say that of yours? Can I say that of mine?

What about Abraham. His example is not of something hidden away, but we read of the struggles in his life. Twice, for fear, he claimed his wife as his sister, and for it, kings suffered. But God called him, **righteous**. And for what, a brilliant offering of his only son? **No**. Only faith and belief. He trusted God. He trusted God.

If only we trusted God enough to leave Him in charge of our secrets. But instead, what do we find ourselves doing? We scramble to hide them for fear that someone might know that we are not the **perfect** Christian they think we are, but human, like them. Sure we fear they'll judge us more harshly. We fear rejection, shame, and disgust. We even fear being chased from the presence of God completely.

"But my bones are groaning, and my strength is sapped." My only encouragement is that, like David, God will forgive the guilt of my sin.

I will rejoice, for my sins will be covered. And, like Abraham, my trust may be accredited to me as righteousness.

How powerful could the church be and how much more healing could be experienced if we actually lived out the commands to confess our sins before each other? We should all long for a place where everyone would feel welcome to be real, not only to God, but with each other. If there is any place in the world we should be able to do this (and **welcomed** to do this) it should be the Church.

Instead, many of us come to church, myself included, with smiles plastered on our faces when our lives are a mess. We offer the rehearsed answers of "I'm great!" or "Fine thanks," or "Cool" or any other term that more than likely describes how we **wished** we were, rather than how we **really are**.

I am all for giving voice to the hope that lies within us, that this situation shall pass and God will reign, but we need to first grapple with who we are **today**. God has given us a great gift, a place for us to live this out in the safety of "family" who are called to forgive others, just as we have been forgiven so that, being uplifted among the saints, we might be fully alive among the lost. **That** gift, **that** sanctuary, is here. The Church.

Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

But, sadly, many Christians feel as though they are **still** condemned - if not by God then by their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

There are people in this church who will **not** let people know the shape that they are in, for fear of being judged, and condemnation. That is **not** God's dream for the Church.

So, what if we don't sort this out? Well, for one thing, there will be broken people longing to find healing and yet, not being able to be real in the one place that should be embracing them.

They will then have to resort to having to hide their sin, their shame, their guilt, and their fears, in a cage of religiosity and conformity.

Fear of judgment will keep them silent, both in, and out of church and their silence will become their self-sufficiency, and their self-sufficiency will ultimately become their god.

An endless cycle ensues where we become entangled by a deep desire to be freed and rescued, but, while being seduced by the lie that no

one cares, we decide that we are better off fixing the problem ourselves.

Rarely do these stories turn out well. Most of us turn to something else to comfort us and heal us, something else that we can co-opt to share our shame and guilt. Where we are faced with the story of a pastor's wife trapped in a world where she could not be real with the very people she ministered to, and in the end turned to an affair.

So, I leave you with a question, and a prayer. May we strive to be a community of grace and forgiveness? A place where people feel safe to confess their sins and shortcomings, **and** the demons they have long been trying to slay, all alone.

The prayer is that they come to know that it doesn't have to be the way it has always been in their lives. That they can come here, the church, and be reassured that we are all jointly responsible, and care, and love each other enough to love them **and** assist them.

To assist them through whatever it may be that they are dealing with. No matter how long it takes. Let us rest assured that **everyone** fails sometime, **everyone** falls sometime, and it is for us to now remove our masks. It is for us to trade our stages for the altar once more, and to be transparent, **and** real. We owe it to each other. We owe it to God.