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**WHFC Summer**  
**Part 5 – The Masks We Wear**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Again, this is one of those weeks. I think I prepared four messages and landed on this one by Thursday. It's like you want to put a sermon plan together, but the way things are changing, it's hard to plan out two or three months because we don't even know what's going to be two or three months from now. But we're going to close out summer next weekend and then kind of kick into the fall with our fall planning, so we're grateful that you have been along on the journey.

As we talk about masks, I saw three critters in our dumpster yesterday, all wearing masks. I hear people going "aww." Listen, if you don't know anything about racoons, they are terrorists. I raise chickens. I have 15 chickens and, this time next month, I may have 12 because of these racoons. They don't even eat them; they just kill them. They are terrorists. I know these are babies. There are four of them; there's one back behind there. I looked at them and I wanted to do that Elf thing where I'm like, "Oh, come here; let me give you a hug, you're so adorable." But they are thinking, *I will rip his face off if he gets any closer.*

What we're talking about today how is looks can be deceiving. And all God's people said... Amen. You've heard it said, "Don't judge a book by it's cover," but today, we're talking about how we tend to look at things and how we tend to judge things. And then how we ourselves try to put off a different view of ourselves or image of ourselves for people, trying to impress those around us.

On Friday, we went down to Rogers to celebrate my daughter's birthday. She wanted to go hold puppies, so we went into a pet store. This is an Aussiedoodle. They put you in a little cubical. They put the dog in with you. I asked the most responsible question of the morning: "How much is this dog?" She wouldn't tell me. She said, "Let me find out." *Oh, you know, but you want us in here playing with this puppy for ten minutes.*

I wasn't planning on getting a dog on Friday. Amy fell in love with this dog in about four seconds. You need to know my wife. You know how you become a top fan on Facebook? My wife is a top fan of only two things: Woodland Hills Family Church and Woof Woof. My wife love dogs. I knew she fell in love and I, as a husband, I'm going to get her this dog. But it's the thought that counts. I want everybody to keep that in mind because I haven't gotten the price of this bad boy yet. It's a girl...

She finally comes over... They don't rush you. She hands me a sheet of paper and says, "Why don't you let me go over the benefits with you before I give you the price?" I'm thinking this is like that car salesman. "Why don't we take it on a drive before I tell you how much it is?"

Well my budget is my budget. She tells we can take this dog home today for \$5,500.00. I immediately hated this dog. I looked at her and said, "Does your boss know you smoke pot on the job? Does he know that?"

I called a buddy of mine who breeds dogs in this town. He raises Goldendoodles and he sells out all the time. He said, "Yeah, I have a friend who went into a similar store in Dallas and was quoted – on a Goldendoodle... I'm not exaggerating. This is the number he gave me: \$8,800.00. The dog was cute until I got the price and then everything I believed about this dog changed.

Today, as talk about appearances, we're going to look at how we try to display ourselves to others. And then when we get to Matthew 15, we have to be very careful with how we try to display ourselves to God, as we look at appearances today. Here's the word that has caused many people to leave a church. I know many people who have walked away from their faith because of this word right here: **hypocrisy**. "I don't want to go there anymore; it's a bunch of hypocrites. They say one thing and do another. They say they believe this, but they live another." Maybe you had family, friends, other church members you know who have walked away from the Lord because of hypocrisy.

When you study this word hypocrisy and you understand it from the times in which Jesus is teaching, 2,000 years ago, it means the donning of a mask. That's my favorite definition of hypocrisy. In that day, they would act out scenes, actors would act out scenes with elaborate masks and that's how they would change characters.

Today, we are going to look at three masks that you can don or put on to try to impress other people and to try to draw near to God. Hopefully, we're going to leave all of those masks. We're not talking about the masks that Stephanie let me borrow. This is an owl. I've got a racoon mask here. I was going to preach the whole morning wearing this happy face on just to creep you all out. We're talking about the way we try to posture ourselves, the way we try to put on a mask.

Maybe when you were a kid growing up, you fought on the way to church and when you got to church, what did your mom and dad say? "Put on your happy face." Or even if you're going to have dinner with friends or family members and you were fighting on the way there. Maybe you've done this as a couple. You haven't been getting along all that well, but you show up somewhere and all of the sudden it's, "We're here and all is good." It's pretending to be someone you're not.

Can I just say I'm grateful to be part of a church where you don't have to pretend to be someone you're not? If I can even encourage you. Don't. I had a buddy years ago who we spent time together, but he wouldn't become part of the church. He wouldn't come to church. He did every now and then, but he said, "Ted, I don't want to go because people will be staring at me." I think one of things when we talk about this... And we need to keep in mind that people aren't looking at you as much as you think they are. People aren't thinking about you as much as you think they are. He goes, "I'm just going to stand out." Because he had a couple of tattoos. I said, "You look like half the people that walk into our church. You're not going to stand out. Don't worry about that." Don't pretended to be someone you're not.

Years ago, Amy and I were invited to a retreat in California at a hotel. A church from Los Angeles brought all their folks out to this hotel. I did four or five sessions on marriage. I'm in the first session and it's more of the comedy thing before you get into the more serious sessions. I'm going at it and when I got to the second row over here, there was a lady sitting there who was the first lady on a television show that Amy and I were currently watching at the time. She was an evil woman on this show. I can't even explain to you the amount of evil that poured out of this woman. I just caught myself... Every time I'd see her, I'd avoid her, and cringe and I'd move on because it just creeped me out.

But she was smiling, and she was engaged. And then as the weekend went on and we would worship, I'd see her with her hands up in worship. That freaked me out because I'm going, *This woman has plotted murder in the oval office*. And then I find out she's a God-fearing woman. She loves the Lord, and I mean the Lord just shines through her.

Finally, at the end of the week, I said, "I have to ask. How can you be so evil on screen when you love the Lord so much?" She said, "Ted, that's kind of the secret of acting. It's easy to play someone opposite of you. That's the easiest part to play. It's easy for me to play that role because I'm nothing like that person." Then I thought, *Boy, how does that apply to hypocrisy that we sometimes have to deal with in the church*.

What we're talking about today is easy. Not setting the mask down but wearing it because you don't feel safe with someone. I just want to say up front, some of you have tried to share sin, failures, shortcomings, transgressions with a family member or a friend or a church member or someone in small group and it was too much for them. Well, I've got good news for you today. It's not too much for Jesus. We just took the Lord's Supper, remembering his death for us and the forgiveness of sins. And when you tried to share that with someone and it was too much for them and you realized you're not safe to share, that's when you went for the mask. "Okay, I'll portray to you or be someone to you that I really am not"

Let's look at the first one that we read of in Matthew 23. I call this **the mask of empty words**. You could also say the mask of hot air. Someone who says something... And, by the way, they can even say the truth, but what they are saying, they don't believe because they're not living it. We believe our behavior flows from our beliefs. So, it's to say one thing in this mask, but it's to live another.

Here's what we read in Mathew 23: **1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat."** Okay, this was an actual seat in the synagogue, a place of authority. What Jesus is going to say is the law that they are teaching, or the teachings of Moses are true; they're right and you should listen to that. **3 "So you must be careful to do everything they tell you.** But watch. **But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."**

Now this is interesting because I've heard this in churches before where a pastor has a moral failure. You hear people... this is the example: pastor has a moral failure, meaning he's preaching one thing but, behind closed doors, he's living another. And people will say... And I've heard it said and I worked through this with a church years ago. People will say, "Well, I got saved under his ministry." "I grew as a

Christian under his ministry.” Because that’s the word of God, right? You’re learning and you’re growing even though this guy wasn’t practicing what he’s preaching. What Jesus is saying is, “Don’t do what they do, don’t follow them, but what they are sharing with you is still the truth.” Here’s the problem. **4 “They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders...”**

What they were doing was taking the human regulation, the stuff... We start with scripture. We call it application. We apply the scripture and we start creating all these other lists. Maybe some of you grew up in a church or a denomination that had massive lists of dos and don’ts that you don’t find in scripture, but they just came up with.

I grew up in one. I don’t think your church will ever beat the church I was in for lists. We had a list for hair. Your hair had to be up over your ears. I’m seeing a lot of you out of the Lord’s will in this service right now. We weren’t allowed to wear shorts. We went swimming in full on clothes because we called that mixed bathing. We didn’t do that. We didn’t play cards. We didn’t go to movies. We could rent the at Blockbuster, but we couldn’t go to the movies. It became very odd. It was hard to keep track of it.

This is exactly what Jesus is saying about the pharisees. When they start adding all this stuff, it’s just weighs people down. This is the mask... and this is where it’s even the scariest. They put it on other people’s shoulders, **“but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”**

Probably one of my greatest fears as a parent, as I teach my kids how to drive... I just taught Corynn how to drive. Now she’s been driving for a year now. I’m teaching my son Carson. He has his permit. I told them the other day that Papa Ron taught me how to drive, but the words I call bad drivers I learned from Poma Bonnie and Grandma Mary Jane.

But isn’t that something? We say it around here all the time. Your children have a front row seat to your life and to your marriage. They’re watching this right here – practicing and preaching. You don’t have to worry about whether or not I’m a hypocrite because all you have to do is talk to my kids. People come up to my kids all the time here and at events, “Does he really live this? He talks about the princess and the queen; does he really treat your mom like a queen?” Why? Because kids... Thousands and thousands of hours a year they have on the front row, watching, listening, remembering, and repeating.

My daughter likes to give me a hard time when I’m not practicing what I’m preaching in teaching her how to drive because sometimes on my way up to Highway 65, I look and there’s no one in my rearview mirror, so I just get in the other lane and maybe or maybe not on the turn signal. I know your supposed to. Corynn, from the back seat, will clear her throat and say, “So, we’re not using turn signals anymore to get into other lanes?” I’m like, “The student is not greater than the teacher.” And all the parents said... Amen. But they are watching and I’m trying to teach them the mechanics of driving. Am I living it out?

We say this in our church all the time: “Make sure your orthodoxy – what you believe – and your orthopraxy – how you live – are matched, they go together.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne said it this way. *“No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.”*

Today, we want to go to the heart, not the outward appearance. That’s not what we get caught up in around here. This is not a church about behavior modification. This is a church that is concerned about your heart because everything about you flows out of your heart.

Robert Redford was chased down in a hotel lobby once. A lady ran after him as he was getting on an elevator. As the doors were closing, she yelled out, “Are you the real Robert Redford?” As the doors were closing, he said, “Only when I am alone.”

So, today, put the mask aside. As we move to this next mask that you need to drop, it’s **the mask of impressing others**. This one is going to be about impressing others. The next one is about how we approach our Heavenly Father. The pharisees had another problem. They wanted to practice their good deeds to look good to you, to look good to me. They wanted people to notice, “I’ve got it going on. See all this great stuff I do.” Had they had social media, multiple posts a day on all the awesomeness flowing out of them.

Continuing in Matthew 23: So, they didn’t practice what they preached and now, **5** *“Everything they do is done for people to see...”* Several things... You get into positions and titles, which is how we like to spin ourselves out there for the world. *“They make their phylacteries...”* which were boxes or pouches that you would put on your arm or on your forehead. It had scripture in it and theirs were large *“...wide and the tassels on their garments long...”* The tassels would remind them of God’s law as they walked along the way. They wanted those objects to be large and to be seen. **6** *“...they love the place of honor...”* Now we get into position. *“...at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted...”* Now we get into titles. *“...with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.”*

Here’s the bottom line with a hypocrite, someone who’s donning a mask or someone who’s pretending to be someone they are not really. **This is a person who is concerned far more with what man sees than with what God sees.** And may you drop that today. We use terms like authentic, transparent, vulnerable, real. May you begin to live your life in front of others and before your Father in heaven, seeking to please him because he sees all. Listen, you can do pretty good hiding from people, but you cannot hide from God.

We’re talking about us putting the mask on, but let’s talk about how we view other people. You remember the story, if you grew up in church, or you’ve read this story before, that God rejected Saul as the King of Israel. So, Samuel is to have a sacrifice and he invites Jesse and his sons. God is going to anoint the new King of Israel. We read this in a story – just a couple of verses in 1 Samuel 16. **6** *When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.”* Why? Because he looked like a leader.

When is the last time someone judged you on your looks? I get it all the time. I have a face that screams middle management. I get asked in stores and restaurants all the time, “Excuse me, do you

work here?" I help people with shoes and shirt sizes all the time. So, I don't scream mighty warrior, I scream retail manager and I'm great with that. How many of you get sick and tired of people judging you by your appearance? Samuel says, "This is the guy" and watch what the Lord says. Take this verse deep into your soul right now. **7** *But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him* (Not to be king). *The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*" We need to start looking at what the Lord looks at and the Lord values your heart above your abilities and above your appearance.

I think the same is true when we read Isaiah 53: 2. They were waiting for the coming Messiah and Isaiah is prophesying about the suffering servant, but it's a chapter on Jesus and we get this picture into what Jesus looked like. **2** *He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.* Speaking there probably of Israel's rejection of the Messiah. But look at this: *He had no beauty or majesty...* When they think Messiah, they're thinking of someone majestic in form, but he had no beauty or majesty *...to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.* We don't judge people by the looks. We are not coming after you and we don't hold people back in our lives by the way they look, their abilities, what their titles say, what their positions are; that is not of priority to the Lord; it's the heart.

That's why this last mask is so important to discuss. **The mask of vain worship.** Drawing near to the Lord with our lips, but our hearts being far from him. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 15. **7** *"You hypocrites!"* Again, they were misusing the law. They were holding back in their lives. He says, *"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 8 These people honor me with their lips..."* So, they are saying the right things, *"...but their hearts are far from me."*

You remember this is what Jesus said to the Church at Ephesus, which we read in Revelation. "You're doing a lot of good things, a lot of good deeds, however, you have forgotten your first love." **9** *"They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."* **10** *Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. 11 What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them...* Please hear what the Lord is teaching us today. It is not about where your hair length is right now. It's not about what you're wearing. It's not about the version of the Bible that you have with you right now or up on our app.

I grew up in this. If everything out here looks good, then great. But on the inside, you're decaying. Your heart is far from Him. That is not what we're going after here. We are concerned about the heart of each person in here. Why? Because the Lord is. And everything that comes out of you, all the stuff on the outside is to flow from the heart, not to be modified out here to change the heart. That's not how it works. Jesus changes the human heart, not behavior. *"...but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."* This is what Proverbs 23 says, "Guard your heart; for it's the wellspring of life." meaning every word you speak, every action you take flows from your heart. It's why, as a parent, you should be far more concerned with your child's heart than you are their behavior. All of their behavior, all of their actions, all of their words flow from the heart. That's why parents are constantly going after the heart of their children.

Robert Wenz shares the story of the Queen Mary. I read this this week and thought this was exactly what Jesus was teaching. *“The Queen Mary was the largest ship to cross the oceans when it was launched in 1936. Through four decades and a world War she served until she was retired, anchored as a floating hotel and museum in Long Beach, California. During the conversion, her three massive smoke-stacks were taken off to be scraped down and repainted. But on the dock, they crumbled.”*

Why? Because the steel inside had rusted through and it was only being held together with some 20-30 coats of paint. This is why Jesus uses the term “whitewashed tombs.” *“...he meant they had no substance, only an exterior appearance.”*

We read this in Matthew 23: 27-28. ***27 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside...”*** They have the appearance. ***“...but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”***

So, here’s the good news today. What is the good news? Because some of you are like, “We’re all hypocrites.” We all lean that way, but the good news is this. Jesus doesn’t need you to act anymore. You don’t act your way to Jesus; you believe your way to Jesus. He doesn’t need you to be someone you’re not. He wants you to believe in him so he can make you someone brand new. Say that again. He doesn’t want you to be someone you’re not; he wants to change you to be someone brand new.

You don’t need to hide here. Why? Because you don’t need to hide from Jesus. You don’t need to act here because you don’t need to act for Jesus. We want the Lord to get hold of your heart. We want the Lord to change you from the inside out. We want the Lord to forgive your sins and out of that, the overflow of that is for you to live a life that wants to honor him, that wants to live like Jesus, that wants to talk like Jesus, that wants to share Jesus with other people. It’s not, “do all the behaviors and hopefully get there.” Jesus changes you and your behavior is just an overflow, not the source of. Jesus is the source of your life. The behavior is the overflow of it.

That’s why Paul got so passionate about this when he was being accused in his ministry of taking advantage of people. He was very clear here and we read this. I’m going to share it to you out of The Message because I like the plain spokenness of this.

***1 Since God has so generously let us in on what he is doing, we're not about to throw up our hands and walk off the job just because we run into occasional hard times. 2 We refuse to wear masks and play games.***

Now don’t you dare take this out of context this week in Branson, Missouri. Are we clear online? This does not have anything to do with ordinances. He’s saying we refuse to pretend around you. This is why I get in so much trouble as a preacher because what you're hearing out of me today is what you’ll hear out of me at lunch. I’m unfiltered a lot. I say things that get me in trouble. I do it when I preach, and I do it at home. I do that while driving in the car.

What Paul is saying is we're not here to play games. That's not at all what this is all about. ***We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes.*** How many of you know somebody like that? They are constantly behind the scenes and your like, *that person's a snake.* Be careful of that person. Paul is saying that's not us. That's not how we minister to you. If we haven't ministered to you that way, we don't want you to live that way. ***And we don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves.*** No, we come to God's word and allow it to change us. We don't change it so it will fit better with what we are wanting to do. ***Rather, we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God.***

Do you want to find freedom in your life? Bring your life out into the open and start today with your Heavenly Father. Confess before him.

Some of you, right now, haven't experienced freedom in a long time because of that addiction that you're trying to keep quiet, trying to keep quiet from a family member, from a spouse, from a parent, and you are in that darkness and you step out and you wear a mask. But this is the day to put that mask down and quit acting one way and living another. Bring it into the light. Bring it before your heavenly father. Confess that before him. Find freedom. No more maneuvering and sneaking around in the dark; bring it to the light. Live in the light. Leave the mask here. Don't try to impress other people with your life. Definitely don't try to impress your Father in heaven; live for him. Live for him, walk with him, believe in him, have faith in him, allow him to change you. And let your life be an overflow of what he's doing in your day to day, ordinary, walk around life.

Would you pray with me? If you've never placed faith in Jesus and you're watching right now or in here or over at the Chapel, that today would be a day. The scripture says if you will confess your mouth that Jesus is Lord (and here it is again) believe in your heart that he has been raised from the dead, you will be saved. This is where God does his business. We're not here handing you a list of extra-biblical rules outside of scripture and traditions that we demand that you live by. We are not going to weigh you down here with that. We want you to have a relationship with Jesus so that today would be the day you place faith in Christ. Faith alone in Christ alone.

For the one right now who has been living in the dark and yet the mask they wear says light, for the one who has been living and hiding and trying to keep things from others and even you Lord, that today would be the day they come into the light, they seek forgiveness, and they find a freedom that they haven't experienced maybe ever in their entire life.

Thank you for a church that let's people be who they are. We tell people, "Come as you are and let Jesus do the work of changing people." That's our desire as a church. May it always be a desire of this church family. We're grateful for what you continue to do here.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.