

ZION, JANUARY 17, 2021

A young boy at the beach was walking along the sand in his swimming suit. He walked up to a lady sitting in the shade of an umbrella. He asked her. "Do you believe in God?" Kind of taken by surprise she responded "Yes." "Are you a Christian?" She responded "Why, yes." "Do you go to church every Sunday?" "Yes, I do." "Do you read your Bible and pray every day?" She confidently responded "Yes, I do." With that the little boy smiled and held out a shiny quarter and asked, "Will you watch my quarter while I play?"

The world will never trust us with their souls until they are convinced that we are genuine Christians. There are five things that the world doesn't need any more of.

- A. **Christians who pretend to be something they are not.**
- B. **Christians who live to please only themselves.**
- C. **Christians who are plastic, pretentious and insincere.**
- D. **Christians who live carelessly when it comes to practicing their faith.**
- E. **Christians who cut themselves off from the 'real' world.**

We can be the real deal. Our faith can be genuine without us being overly pious, pretentious or condescending. Jesus was impressed with this man Nathaniel because he was a man who was 'real.'

"Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Nathaniel was what the Pharisees could only profess to be. Nathaniel was what the Pharisees pretended to be. He was a man in whom there was no deceit. No guile. No fakery. No facade. No hypocrisy. Nathaniel was a true person. He lived righteously with nothing to hide. Jesus himself testified to the genuineness of this man's character. **"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"**

Is that not how you want to be regarded by your Lord Jesus? Here is a Christian who is real and genuine. A Christian who is authentic. A Christian who is what they seem to be. Nathaniel's response was predictable. **"How do you know me?"** Jesus let him know that when nobody else saw him, He was seeing him. His testimony about Nathaniel bears witness to the fact that Jesus not only saw him, but saw in him. Let me say that again: HIS TESTIMONY ABOUT NATHANIEL BORE WITNESS TO THE FACT THAT JESUS NOT ONLY SAW HIM, BUT SAW IN HIM. He saw what was inside him. He saw into his soul. He peered into his very essence.

Jesus sees beyond what others see. Jesus sees us as we really are. Jesus sees beyond the masks that we present to others. Not the outward masks we wear because of Covid-19 but the inward masks that we hide behind. The masks we hide behind to cover up who we really are. There are two dangers in living behind masks.

You might start believing them.

Others might start believing them.

But notice if you will the instant promise made to this 'real' disciple called Nathaniel. **"Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."**

Jesus must first bring us to a point of self-honesty before He can give us what He so desires to give us.

WE ARE TO GET REAL WITH JESUS. The revelation that Jesus made that He had seen Nathaniel under the fig tree was far more than merely that He had seen him in a specific location. Fig trees in gardens was a favorite place for many to retire to pray and meditate.

While the Pharisees were 'performing' their prayers in the streets to be seen, this man of God was finding himself a private place to get alone with God. Jesus was in fact saying "I knew you in your prayer closet. I knew you in that intimate private place where you come to talk with Me."

Nathaniel could get real with Jesus because he had been doing it for years. Genuine prayer removes the masks that stand between a real faith and a mask of religiosity.

MASKS HINDER OUR INTIMACY WITH JESUS. We, like Nathaniel, can feel right at home with Jesus because He already knows us better than any friend ever has. Yet, for many of us, we are living a guarded life even with Jesus. The insecure often hide behind masks because they don't like what they see, and are afraid to let anyone else in. Intimacy is revealing who we really are... face fear of rejection, vulnerability. But oh, the release when we realize that the One who knows us best, loves us most.

THE MASKS WERE JESUS' FIRST TARGET. Jesus never liked masks. He always dealt with them first. He understood better than anyone that not everyone is what they seem to be. He removed the Pharisee's masks to reveal a lifeless religion. He removed the rich young ruler's mask to reveal a man bound up by greed. He removed the masks of the mob that held stones to reveal a crowd of sinners. He removed the masks of the woman at the well to reveal an adulteress.

No doubt Nathaniel had seen the religiosity of the Pharisees. Now he knew without a doubt that God sees beyond our 'religious airs.' Nathaniel wanted more than a surface sanctity. An outward appearance of Holiness. He wanted a real relationship with Jesus. You've got to lose the masks if you want a real encounter with Jesus.

THE MASKS LOCK JESUS AND HIS HEALING OUT. Jesus could reveal so much to Nathaniel that He couldn't reveal to others. Why? Because the pretense was gone.

When the masks go, we can admit our pains and our hurts and our needs. When the masks go, we can begin again, but this time with Christ. Nathaniel realized that the real problem wasn't a matter of action. It was a matter of the heart. His heart was open to Jesus. He was in pursuit of a faith that doesn't merely change your actions, but changes your heart. He understood that God sees our motives first.

We are to move our focus from what others think and see to what God knows about us. It will change your life. It will open your life to the great things God has in store for you. It will release you from the bondage of legalism. It will give you the liberty that a relationship with Jesus brings. Nathaniel was quick to respond and accept Jesus because his masks had been removed. He had come to know Him in prayer years before.

WE ARE TO GET REAL WITH OURSELVES. The greatest lies you will ever tell are the lies you tell yourself. The greatest lies you will ever tell are the lives that you tell yourself. Don't ignore who you really are, so that you can give yourself totally to God. Jesus said that Nathaniel was without deceit. He didn't say that he was without fault. He didn't say that he was perfect. He didn't say that he was without sin. It is obvious from earlier verses that he had some flawed misconceptions. Some prejudiced views about Nazareth and about Jesus.

But here's the important thing about Nathaniel: he possessed a spirit that was willing to be changed. A spirit to be molded by God. Nathaniel had learned how not to live flawlessly, but blamelessly. As soon as he would discover a wrong in his life, he was quick to remedy it and submit to God.

LIVING 'REAL' IS LIVING CHRIST-CENTERED. It's when we become more concerned with God's image than ours. It's living not so others can pat us on the back, but so that God would receive the glory. Blameless living seeks God's glory in our lives. Masks try and make us look better.

When David was caught in his sin by the prophet Nathan he cried because he'd brought dishonor to God's name. Pride is concerned with what everyone else thinks of you. Righteousness is concerned with what God thinks of you. Living real means that we are not concerned about the opinions of others as much as we are about the opinion of God.

LIVING 'REAL' IS LIVING HONESTLY WITH GOD. It means recognizing our faults without denying or defending them. God isn't looking for perfect people but those who know how to deal with their faults. It's this attitude that opens our lives to the constant changing God brings. This never means that we're proud of our faults. Our masks and hypocritical spirit cause us to make excuses for our faults and failures. Our masks cause us to defend them in front of others when a sincere heart will just give them to God.

We see it in Simon Peter when Jesus revealed to him that he would deny him three times. We see the defensiveness of Peter. We see the denial. Then we see the failure. It wasn't until he failed that he was willing to get real with Jesus. What will it take for you to lose your masks? Have you already removed some of them? To some people? How about all of them to all people?

LIVING 'REAL' IS LIVING SINCERELY. Nathaniel was sincere about serving God. Sincere living is being serious about our faith without being uptight about it. Without being sanctimonious about it. Without flaunting it or throwing it in everyone's face. Without being suffocatingly pious. Sincere living is a faith that is lived simply and obediently. Sincere living is living rightly no matter who you're with.

A young man was asked by a man looking to employ him, "If I hire you, will you be honest?" The young man answered, "I will be honest whether you hire me or not."

GET REAL WITH THE WORLD. Nathaniel stood out from those who just called themselves religious in his time because he was 'real.'

'Real' Christians shine and the world takes note. This world doesn't need a stain-glass Jesus. It needs a 'real world' Jesus. A Jesus that is relevant to the challenges people face day by day. If you're living a Sunday morning faith... you're not fooling everybody.

A pompous teacher was endeavoring to impress upon a class of boys the importance of living the Christian life. "Why do people call me a Christian?" the man asked. After a moment's pause, one boy said, "Maybe it's because they don't know you."

TO BE REAL IS TO BE GRACE FILLED. Self-righteousness and false piety make the world sick. They turn people off. They lead people away from the true Jesus and the true faith. The bible tells us that grace leaves no room for boasting, for prideful strutting around. We have no right to promote ourselves above other sinners. We're not reaching down; we are reaching over.

When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he didn't address his audience as "them sinners" but as "Fellow Jews." Why? Because he had just weeks before fallen and was in need of grace. We all stand in need of grace. We are fallen sinners who stand in need of being restored.

BE REAL. BE HUMAN. No matter what some people would have you believe, we are not immune to sickness and hardship as believers. Don't paint an unrealistic picture to those around you. Let them see the hardship but let them also have a front row seat in seeing God take you through it victoriously. No one seeks out a guide from someone who has never been through what they are going through.

BE REAL. BE COMPASSIONATE. Jesus was called "a friend to sinners." Sinners are not the enemy. Sinners are victims of sin. Few strangers lead people to Christ... but friends do. Don't be afraid to let people see who you really are. If you are transparent before Jesus, you don't have to worry about being transparent before men.

Do you know how to tell the difference between a real diamond and a fake? The real diamond can cut glass. The difference is in the mark they make. Are you making a mark for Jesus Christ in your world? It's time to get real today. It's time to remove the masks and let Jesus deal with who we really are.