

10. Behind the Mask (1Q 2015—Proverbs)

Biblical material: Prov. 25:2, 3; 26:11, 12; 1 Cor. 1:20, 21; Prov. 26:13–16; 27:5, 6.

Quotes

- Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth. *Oscar Wilde*
- A mask tells us more than a face. *Oscar Wilde*
- All falsehood is a mask; and however well made the mask may be, with a little attention we may always succeed in distinguishing it from the true face. *Alexandre Dumas*
- Without wearing any mask we are conscious of, we have a special face for each friend. *Oliver Wendell Holmes*
- Virtue has a veil, vice a mask. *Victor Hugo*
- We all have a social mask, right? We put it on, we go out, put our best foot forward, our best image. But behind that social mask is a personal truth, what we really, really believe about who we are and what we're capable of. *Phil McGraw*
- All of us have ways in which we mask and cover our pain. *Iyanla Vanzant*

Questions

What are the reasons for wearing a mask, and what do they tell us? Why should we look behind the mask—how does this help us? Do we see God wearing a mask? How do we truly reveal ourselves by removing our masks—and is this wise? Instead of living a life that is a sham, how can we be authentic Christians representing our Lord?

Bible summary

Proverbs 25 invites us to look again at what we think we see. It argues for justice and wise decisions in all areas of life. It is primarily talking about good judgment and discernment—values often lacking in today's world. While some of the proverbs may sound contradictory, at least they invite us to think about such matters! Proverbs 26 points out that there is no reasoning with a fool. If someone has opposing views of life and destiny, while you try to debate and see if they will change their minds, if they are unwilling to consider your points then you are wasting your time. In the end thinking as a fool is destructive, both to the fool and to those around. "Like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death is one who deceives their neighbor and says, 'I was only joking!'" Prov. 26:18, 19 NIV. We are to be aware of ourselves and our limitations: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." Prov. 27:1 NIV. Nor are we to be proud of ourselves. We are to help one another like iron sharpening iron. The chapter concludes with advice to pay attention to our affairs so we can live wisely. 1 Cor. 1:20, 21 FBV tells us: "How about the wise, the writers, and the philosophers of this age? Hasn't God turned the wisdom of this world into foolishness? Since God in his wisdom allowed the world in its wisdom not to know God, it was God's gracious plan that by the foolishness of the good news those who trusted in him would be saved."

Comment

Visiting the Cairo Museum I took the time to seek out Tutankhamum. Well, the famous mask, at least. I stood and looked for ages. Nobody else seemed bothered. Hardly anyone else came, and when they did, it was just a quick glance before they moved on.

I stood fixed to the spot, enchanted by the beauty of the gleaming gold and the shimmering lapis lazuli blue. I stared into the sightless eyes and thought of this pharaoh, the most powerful king of all the earth at that time. How his father had sought monotheism, but Tutankhamum had gone back to the old gods of Egypt. Then, at the early age of 19, he had died. His well-preserved tomb had been discovered in 1922, containing his chariot and all the other goods expected to be needed in the other world. Expectation of life after death—models of servants and boats, food and drink gold and jewels... Someone should have told him, “You can’t take it with you.” No one can.

Tutankhamum was worshiped as a god even during his lifetime. No doubt he wore many masks in his dealing with different people—with his worshipers, his servants, his advisors. But he is famous for that last mask, the one made to cover his face in death.

We all wear masks, and we need to take them off and face the truth. We also need to look behind the masks of all around us, to see what reality really is. Most of all we need to deny all the foolishness, which is what the mask is trying to hide. For as the Roman poet Ovid observed, “In our play we reveal what kind of people we are.”

Comment 2

Do you not know that there comes a midnight hour when every one has to throw off his mask? Do you believe that life will always let itself be mocked? Do you think you can slip away a little before midnight in order to avoid this? Or are you not terrified by it? I have seen men in real life who so long deceived others that at last their true nature could not reveal itself;... In every man there is something which to a certain degree prevents him from becoming perfectly transparent to himself; and this may be the case in so high a degree, he may be so inexplicably woven into relationships of life which extend far beyond himself that he almost cannot reveal himself. But he who cannot reveal himself cannot love, and he who cannot love is the most unhappy man of all. *Soren Kierkegaard*

Ellen White Comments

The God of providence still walks among us, though His footsteps are not seen, though His positive and direct workings are not recognized or understood. The world in its human wisdom knows not God. The Lord designs that through human beings His glory, not the glory of men, shall be manifested. It is His light that shines through His agencies. Providence and revelation work in divine harmony, revealing God as first, and last, and best in everything. {RC 198}

When the Holy Spirit moves upon human minds all petty complaints and accusations between man and his fellow man will be put away. The bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness will shine into the chambers of the mind and heart. In our worship of God there will be no distinction between rich and poor, white and black. All prejudice will be melted away. When we approach God it will be as one brotherhood. We are pilgrims and strangers, bound for a better country, even a heavenly. There all pride, all accusation, all self-deception, will forever have an end. Every mask will be laid aside, and we shall “see him as he is.” {HP 288}