

Victory of the Lamb – Let's Be Real Series

1 Kings 19:1-5a Masked – Pastor Bill Limmer

Just over a week from today is Mardi Gras, Fat Tuesday. There is going to be a huge parade on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, It will be crazy. Some people will act and do things that they wouldn't normally do. There will be beads and drinking and many people will be wearing masks. Sometimes we conceal our true identity by our accomplishments, positions, status, failing to realize that those things will all change. Everyday people go about their day, wearing a mask, pretending to be ok when they are actually angry, concerned, depressed, hiding, hurting, lonely or another common thousand maladies that move in and sometimes stay in our lives for way too long. Let's be real . . . In addition to Bourbon Street there is another place where people often wear masks – church. People hide the real "me." We greet each other, "how are you?" "Great," and you?" "Great!" Let's be real. Sometimes that is true and sometimes this isn't even close to being true.

Putting on a mask is nothing new. So let's dive into the sacred writings and into our own sometimes rocky lives. There is a fascinating that contains an epic battle between the prophets of a false god and Elijah a follower of the Savior God. Both sides want to prove that they are worshiping the true God. So prophets of Baal and Elijah decide to duel it out, to show who the true God was. Here is how that was going to be decided. Each in their own turn would set up an altar to their god, and each side would sacrifice a bull and which ever god consumed the offering would be declared by power and by right to be the true God. And whoever wasn't worshiping the true God would be put to death. Sounds kind of vicious both that's what the deal was. The 450 prophets of Baal went first. They constructed a wooden altar, cut up the bull placed it on the altar and began to pray. And the minutes turned into half hours, and half hours into hours and nothing was happening. Elijah in a moment of great sarcasm, that I relate to way too much, said to them: Shout louder maybe he is in deep thought, or is just busy or traveling. And so they did. And they were so intense that they began to self-mutilate by cutting themselves. And, there was no answer because actually Baal was an idol. Do you know that the word idol means "good for nothing?" Accurate right? So the prophets of Baal swung and struck out. It is now Elijah's turn because maybe neither of them had the true God. He builds altar, he cuts up bull and places it on the altar and he instructs the people to pour four large water jars of water on the altar. And he asks them to do this two more times. And they did. They whole place is drenched. It is like an inground swimming pool And Elijah prays that God would reveal himself so that the people would turn back and follow him. And God in a show of almighty power and glory consumes the offering, the altar, and the water in fire. When all the people saw this they exclaimed, the Lord is God. And the prophets of Baal were slaughtered.

This is amazing. This is powerful. This is a once in a lifetime happening. This is historical. This is exciting. And here is what happens within 24 hours of that glass ceiling breaking moment **1 Kings 19:1-5a Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.** ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." ³ Elijah was afraid^[a] and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

Wow. Let's be real. A prophet of God with problems, who would have thought. A prophet of God who was fearful. Wow. A prophet of God with depression, and severe depression at that – who would have thought of that? We all suffer from difficult times or seasons in life: things that makes us feel down, and so often we put on a mask and fake it. And some of us suffer through actual clinical depression at Elijah did. And sometimes depression can get so bad that it actually changes a person's facial look, it is called a depression mask. And sometimes person may even pray like Elijah, "Take my life."

Do you know anyone like that? Are you that person? You know it sounds like the pop singer who is making millions and has hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram but isn't content or complete; it sounds like a mom who is up to her neck in diapers and kid sicknesses, it sounds like a dad who is wishing to move the financial needle up and to the right, it sounds like a millennial or next gen who is trying to consume the volumes of content of social media and make it make sense, it sounds like the elderly who is lonely or who remember the glory days, Do you know anyone like that? I do.

I was that person. When we left our first pastoral position, I fell into depression. It was bad but it was going to get a lot worse later. I remember a confirmation student telling me one morning, you look funny. That was the depression mask. After a few years I took another pastoral position and I was running fast and hard, not out on the road, but in ministry. I was serving as the evangelism pastor of a church that averaged 150 guests per weekend. I was also in a great doctorate program. I learned so much. But after every major project was done, I was all but paralyzed. I lost physical coordination, I had trouble navigating bleachers at a basketball game and maintaining mental focus. It was ugly but it was going to get worse. Alyssa was diagnosed with cancer. And I was such a piece of blank dad that I didn't protect my daughter from this horrible disease. As you know Alyssa was cured in an amazing display of God's power, when the doctors said we are done, God said I'm not. Yet my depression didn't go away or subside. At the time my son had a friend who drew a picture of what we as a family liked to do: and the picture of me, was sleeping. I would get home around 5 and go lay down, before the next round of evening meetings began. I would plead with God as Elijah, "take my life." By God's grace that is not me today but it was me back then. So if you need to talk I know a guy.

Let's be real. Life can be a difficult journey this side of heaven. There are times and seasons of animosity, boredom, confusion, fear, grief, hurt, insecurity, loneliness, pride, rejection, sin and a whole bunch of other maladies, It's ok to not be ok. Perfectionism is a mask. Perfectionism makes us tired and worn out because we know it's not true. Satan deludes every person, whether you are following Jesus or an atheist or anyone in between, to think that you are the only one (like the snowman across the street from my house out in the cold), that no one will understand, or that you are the only who can do this, friends and family can't help so we don't let them into our struggles, God can't help and you are just stuck.

I know someone else besides Elijah, me, and maybe where the pain of life was so great. Jesus. Matthew 26:36-38 **Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."** So here is what Jesus did. He prayed. When you and I pray, we are admitting I need help, this is too big for me. Taking time to pray is cutting things out of our lives and so of us need to do that. It is ok to say "no." Saying "no" now, doesn't mean it is always going to be "no." Jesus told somebody, he told Peter, James, and John. So guess what we are launching today – new small groups. Our small groups can be an ideal place to let your guard down, be

real, and honestly study God's Word with other people who are there to encourage you and help you experience God's transforming truth and love of Jesus.

Jesus doesn't leave us with the diagnosis. He provides the remedy. He is the remedy. Jesus made you and paid for you. Galatians 3:27 **for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** In baptism a person is not masked but covered and clothed with Christ, his work, his identity, his status, his position, his perfection. You see sin and trouble maybe enslaving you, depression may be crushing you, but let's be real – through it Jesus, the Savior God, is holding you.