

## ***Beyond the Mask: Genuine Liberty***

Good morning!

July is still a good bit off yet, but we're going to get into the Spirit of 1776 a little early and talk about "Genuine Liberty." That's because there is an exciting new film I think you'll all want to see that takes a new look at Liberty, and celebrates our Redemption too.

It's called ***Beyond the Mask***.

In the spirit of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, but set in the American Colonial Period, ***Beyond the Mask*** is the story of Will Reynolds, an assassin for the *British East India Company* who is double-crossed and seeks revenge. In seeking justice, he takes on several personas to stay alive, falls in love, and eventually helps Benjamin Franklin ensure our country's birth.

All the while, he is trying to right his past wrongs, remove his "mask," and win his girl, Charlotte.

It's a rollicking action-adventure film with something for everyone of every age...if you like explosions, pirates, romance, horses, and swordplay, then you'll love it! And, like the Bible, it has a message about Genuine Liberty.

Set during our country's battle for freedom, we have on this grand stage of our American Revolution a smaller saga with Will Reynolds' battle for personal freedom.

Before I give too much away, let's take a look at the trailer for ***Beyond the Mask*** and one remarkable man's search for Genuine Liberty:

[Beyond the Mask](#)

Pretty exciting stuff! The cinematography is just breathtaking. You feel like you're back in Colonial America again, but with a fresh and vibrant new feel, clamoring along with Will for our country's liberty.

So what exactly is Liberty?

Liberty. A word we hear so much that we may not dwell on its immense value enough.

It is quite literally the DNA of every American and our revered historical heritage for over 200 years, won with the blood of our ancestors who wrestled it from the tyranny of King George III...but what is it exactly?

Unfortunately, many Americans take it for granted and fail to really grasp what Liberty actually means. So how would you define Liberty?

Some would say that Liberty is the freedom to do what we want to do when we want to do it.

If you think that, then you would miss the true meaning of Liberty, spiritually speaking.

Genuine Liberty is the freedom to do what is right, and that freedom comes from knowing Jesus Christ and His personal forgiveness for your crimes. Yes, crimes, and those crimes carry a penalty. But there is good news in Christ, and a power in knowing Him as a friend, a real living Person, as real as your right hand, and that relationship is centered on genuine freedom (from sin).

As Americans, we normally celebrate our liberty from Great Britain on July 4<sup>th</sup>, but as Christians we celebrate our spiritual liberty from death and sin every day, or at least we should, right? We no longer have to hide our sin and guilt behind a facade. We can take off our mask with a holy God who now loves us.

So when you think of a mask, what's the first thing that comes to mind? For me, a mask is something we hide behind because we don't want to be found out. And that usually means we've done something wrong. We have broken the Law.

## **A Mask Means A Criminal**

Let's look at Luke 4:16-21

*“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘**The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.**’ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”*

This was an amazing moment! These are the prophetic words that Jesus read in His hometown temple to announce the beginning of His ministry. He said that this Scripture from Isaiah 61 was fulfilled in Him because He came to proclaim release from our past sins, to set us free.

But “*to set free*” implies a prisoner, and a prison sentence means we've been found guilty of wrongdoing to some charge. But what are we guilty of that needs His pardon?

Let's consider our ***Beyond the Mask*** hero, Will Reynolds, who is an assassin who wants a new beginning, desperate for freedom from his dark past, and a perfect type of every

one of us. As Paul said in Romans chapter three, “*we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*” In other words, no one is perfect. We would all agree with that. We have all blown it, right?

But we’re not that bad. We haven’t murdered anyone like Hitler or Stalin. Those guys were truly bad. They deserved it, but we are basically good. We haven’t raped anyone or embezzled millions of dollars. Our good deeds definitely outweigh our few unintentional mistakes...right? I mean, after all, we’re only human.

Let’s look at how God views our human condition, and James 2:10 simplifies it for us:

*“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of **all.**”*

It may help to have a picture in our mind of God’s Law. Imagine it as a big, red, shiny balloon. One of those extra large circus balloons that just looks absolutely perfect. That’s representative of God’s perfect Law. It is a manifestation of His holiness, not a shred of imperfection. It’s just perfect. Flawless!

How many pins would you have to stick in it to break it?

If we are honest, we must agree with James, and with Paul who said that we have “*all sinned and fallen short of His glory (holiness).*” We’re guilty as charged...for all of it because we are not holy.

You see that’s because God doesn’t grade on a curve or use a scale to weigh our good and bad deeds. His standard is absolute holiness...perfection...no sin at all. A holy God who has never sinned must be a holy and righteous judge as well. And we are not holy.

In His courtroom, we are all guilty, and that is the bad news. We are captives, in prison for breaking His Law, and deserve to be judged for our crimes.

So what do we do? Like Will Reynolds, we run!

We hide our shame and guilt. We know deep down in our hearts, we are not truly good...not compared to God’s red balloon. We wear a mask to shape an identity of what we think people want to see so that they will like us, and rationalize our crimes with good works to earn His favor.

We want to be accepted and loved. We all do. We are starved for significance, desperate to be loved. When who we are isn’t noteworthy, then we manufacture an identity. We wear a mask just like Will Reynolds.

And who wears a mask? Criminals wear masks. What a perfect picture that ***Beyond the Mask*** drives home with Will’s action-packed adventures as he figures this out trying to win his true love, Charlotte.

But he's exposed by his old partner, Joshua Brand, who tells him his disguise is "*an absurd mask.*"

19:06 to 21:30

Joshua lays it out for him, doesn't he? "*Hell's been waiting a very long time for you, Will Reynolds.*" He's guilty, no matter how hard he loves Charlotte or tries to win her. He is a fraud.

The truth of the matter is that we are all frauds and not lovable. We are felons; criminals like Will Reynolds, who is in rebellion against authority, and living a lie.

We deserve His righteous judgment. As the thief said on the cross in Luke 23,

*"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*

We are all guilty. We've broken the red balloon. The situation is hopeless. Or is it?

Look at what C.S. Lewis said,

*"Of course God does not consider you hopeless. If He did, He would not be moving you to seek Him (and He obviously is)."*

## **On The Lamb**

*"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; **and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all** (Isaiah 53:4-6)."*

Will is struggling to build up enough good deeds to tip the scale in his favor, to win his girl by demonstrating he is a changed man. He wants to shift the balance of good deeds to outweigh his bad deeds, something most Americans think will get them into Heaven.

But a religion of good deeds doesn't solve the question of punishment for our crimes (sin) already committed, does it? An honest judge will pass sentence.

*"He saved us, **not because of righteous things we had done**, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)."*

This verse clearly shows that salvation is not based on our effort. As does Ephesians 2:8-9, which says,

*“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

Still think you're holy in God's sight? What if you sin just once a day for 70 years...that's over 25,000 sins in a lifetime! And we all sin much more than once a day. God must punish our sin or he is not righteous.

Friends, we are guilty before a holy God, and we cannot “work” that out by being good. The pin has pricked the red balloon. It is broken, and so are we.

Let's look at this awesome clip from the movie, where Charlotte helps Will see this same truth. Charlotte explains this spiritual law to the captive Will when she says, *“Don't you know? Neither redemption or love can ever be earned.”*

1:09:14 to 1:11:15

Powerful lines! *“You have to but ask. They are both gifts, gifts to be granted freely from the heart of God.”*

Christianity is a different “religion” in that it isn't a religion at all. It has nothing to do with effort and works and good deeds. It has everything to do with surrender and doing nothing and only believing. Asking for His forgiveness, but on His terms...surrender.

Jesus came looking for lost sheep to rescue, as the Good Shepherd, to lay down His life for us...to become sin and take our judgment Himself. He became sin for us and took God's righteous judgment in our place. When a gangster escapes, it's called being “on the lamb” and that is PRECISELY what happened at the cross.

We escaped because our punishment went **on** *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).”*

When Jesus promised the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43, *“today you will be with me in paradise”* what work or effort could he have done to earn forgiveness? Nothing. He just believed on Jesus as His savior, and was promised Paradise.

A righteous judge demands a righteous payment for sin, and since none of us are righteous, the only one without any sin who could pay that price is...God Himself...Jesus Christ. *“Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23).”*

## **Beyond The Ask**

So that's the bad news. We are guilty, deserve righteous condemnation, and need a savior, someone to rescue us as Jesus said He fulfilled when reading Isaiah 61:1 in his hometown temple.

That's the good news, the gospel: Jesus sat in the electric chair in our place. Now what? How do we get this stay of execution, this parole? How do we ask for forgiveness and be sure we've got His pardon?

Paul lays it out simply to the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 1:13-14:

*“And you also were included in Christ when you **heard the message of truth**, the gospel of your salvation. When you **believed**, you were **marked in him with a seal**, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”*

We listened to the gospel. We hear that we are guilty and need forgiveness in Christ's payment for our sin.

We believed it. By faith, we accept His terms, ask for forgiveness, and surrender to Him as Lord and Savior, not an intellectual assent, but a genuine belief that is evidenced by repenting (changing our mind about who is in charge now and following Him). We give up, realize our good works aren't good enough, and that we are hopeless without His payment for our sin. And then...

We are sealed with the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will LITERALLY come inside of your body and seal you as His own possession, forgiving your sins (because the Holy Spirit and sin cannot abide in the same vessel. You'd explode!). He takes possession of you, now **His** captive that He then pardons and releases from prison!

The Bible is crystal clear that we can know for sure where we are going when we die. That's why it was written for us—to **know** we have eternal life.

*“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know** that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).”*

And how do we know for sure? John told us in the same chapter, verses 11 and 12, that there are two kinds of people:

*“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

Knowing for sure that you are a Christian is not a hope. It is a clear 100% certainty that is based on the answer to this one question:

For you personally, where is the Holy Spirit right this very second?

If you cannot answer that He is inside of your body, literally, right this very second, because you asked Him to come inside of you, then don't fool yourself. You are not a real believer. As John said, *"He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son does not have the life."*

It's simple. That's what it means to be born again...spiritually. Look what Jesus said in John 3,

*"Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.'*

*Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'*

*'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'*

*Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'"*

We are born physically when the water breaks in our mother's womb to signal that our arrival is imminent. But being born of the Spirit is the second birth, a spiritual birth, and one that we must all choose by believing in His Son, trusting His gospel message, and receiving the Holy Spirit's residence into our physical body!

So what is the gospel message exactly? It's not complicated. Here's what Paul simply said in 1 Corinthians 15:

*"Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve."*

Now look what Paul said to the church at Corinth:

*"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his*

*appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God** (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)."*

God has imputed His righteousness to you in that you are now as holy and righteous as Jesus Christ. It's as if God sees you through the righteous lens of Jesus Christ, perfect and holy in your standing now in that same courtroom. You are free, forgiven, and holy!

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

That's what happens when you ask Him to save you! God's justice and wrath and love all merge together at the cross and you are set free!

So God, in the greatest love ever seen, made Jesus become sin, and then punished Him instead of us, so that we could then be holy, as righteous as God Himself. Let's read that verse again.

*"God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him **we might become the righteousness of God.**"*

This may be the most astonishing truth in the New Testament! God-the Son became sin in order to make us as righteous as God-the Father.

Imagine...you can be as righteous and holy as the God of the universe, as Jesus Himself.

This theological term is called **Imputation**, which is defined as *"designating any action or word or thing as reckoned to a person. Thus in doctrinal language (1) the sin of Adam is imputed to all his descendants, i.e., it is reckoned as theirs, and they are dealt with therefore as guilty; (2) the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them that believe in Him, or so attributed to them as to be considered their own; and (3) our sins are imputed to Christ, i.e., he assumed our 'law-place,' undertook to answer the demands of justice for our sins.*

This is most clearly explained by Paul in his letter to the Romans (5:12-19),

*"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.*

*But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one*

*man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!"*

*Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made **righteous**."*

That is what He did, my friends. He imputed His righteousness to us. The Holy One of God took upon Himself all of our crimes, past, present, and future...and then took God's righteous wrath for it all so that we could become holy and perfect in His sight.

That is good news!

## **A Revolution of Freedom**

*"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17)."*

Look at Will's reaction when he understands God's grace (undeserved favor). Like Will, we threw a brick in God's face and then God goes to the cross in our place. We deserved death and got life. That's grace! Unmerited favor! It's crazy!

**1:13:57 to 1:16:21**

Isn't that beautiful! *"I have strived in vain to redeem my name, but God in his mercy has done the work I could never do. He has redeemed my name and given me His."*

Will found a new identity in Christ...and so can you, today...right now.

We fought a revolution against the British, flesh and blood, but Christ Jesus fought a spiritual revolution against the power of Death. Paul said in Romans 6:23 that if we're employed at *Sin, Incorporated*, then our paycheck in two weeks would be death. That's our wage.

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Simple, isn't it? You don't have to do any thing at all. It's a free gift. You don't earn a birthday gift...you just take it. It's just faith, believing He did it all. Paul said the same here:

*"For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but **Christ lives in me**. The life I now live in the body, I live **by faith** in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside*

*the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing (Galatians 2:19-21)!”*

Think about that. If we can be good enough for a holy God by what we do, works of righteousness like charity and service, then Jesus died for nothing!

Finally, look at Isaiah 64:4,

*“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and **all** our righteous acts are like **filthy rags** (to a holy God);*

The Hebrew word for “*filthy rags*” means our very best is a “woman’s menstrual cloth” to a holy God, bloody, and soiled beyond any usefulness for righteousness.

If you do not know for sure you’re going to Heaven, I pray today you will find the liberty made available to you in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a free gift that you only need to ask for in humility, realizing you can’t be righteous apart from Jesus Christ.

You can do that today, right now where you’re sitting, as 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “*For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, **now** is the time of God’s favor, **now** is the day of salvation.*”

As Jesus said in Luke 4, **today** is the “*favorable year of the Lord.*” **Now** is the day of salvation. I hope you’ll make some real history today and go **Beyond the Mask** for Genuine Liberty!

Let’s pray.