

WHAT DID JESUS SAY? PART 1 ABOUT MAN

“Get Rid O That Inferiority Complex”

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Psalms 8

It was a September morning much like this nearly eighteen years ago. A father and son stood together beneath the arching dome of a small town railroad station in California. Within a few moments the boy would board a train for the great Midwest and his freshman year in college.

There were so many things the father wanted to say to this eager fledgling about to flee the security of the nest. But, as we've often discovered, the hardest people in the world to talk to seriously and intimately are those we love the most. Such was the case on that occasion.

There were so many guideposts the father wanted to point out to his son. So many lessons he had learned in the school of hard knocks he wanted to share. But, somehow, their very closeness was a barrier. As the fleeting moments passed their farewell conversation was punctuated by huge hunks of awkward silence. And then, as the boy was about to board the train, the father grips his hand and said, “Son, remember who you are!”

As I have said, that was nearly eighteen years ago. And, while my father has probably forgotten them long ago, those five words live on in my heart. I don't think my dad could have given me any greater words of wisdom, any higher moral code, any better rule of behavior than that which is contained in one short sentence, “Son, remember who you are!”

I think it was then that I began to conquer the inferiority complex which had plagued me from childhood. Because like every mother's son I, too, was gripped with feelings of inferiority. Psychologists tell us that every person who ever lived has an inferiority complex to some degree. As a result, their energy is reduced and their strength is sapped, their mind is clogged with negative thoughts about themselves, all of which keep them from going on to greater things. They simply do not believe in themselves, their abilities and potentialities.

I heard a story the other day about two ghosts who were haunting a house. Along about midnight they heard a terrible noise. It got louder and louder, and more and more grotesque, until one of the ghosts, shaking with fear, turned to his friend and said, “Hey buddy, do you believe in people?”

I think the trouble with far too many of us is that we don't believe in people. We don't believe in ourselves. We have forgotten who we are. And this disbelief in ourselves has festered away until our whole being has become infected with a shrinking shyness which makes us certain that, while we may earn a passing grade in some area of life in which we have a special talent, for the most part we are doomed to mediocrity.

The tragedy of all this is that no one need struggle through life with this phantom of inferiority on his or her back. Jesus made it perfectly clear that everyone of us is of inestimable worth. You are more than the product of nature's assembly line, he said. You were made by God. You are the very reason the whole world came into being. You are the purpose of it all. So Get Rid of That Inferiority Complex for you are the crown jewel of God's creation.

Now Jesus was not preaching humanism. He wasn't suggesting we should worship man. He wasn't urging that we sing, “Glory to man in a highest, for man is the master of things.” But he was urging us to remember who we are.

He was opposing anything false, whether it be the false pride of the Pharisees, who boasted they were not as bad as other men, or the false humility of those who grovel in the dust of mediocrity, excusing their failures, because they are not as good as other men.

The Right Kind Of Humility

To be sure there is a need for the right kind of humility. The kind of humility which would wash the wounds of a broken person regardless of his or her color or class, station or standing in life. There is a need for the kind of humility that does the menial task, the thankless job, the unseen

kindness. There is a need for the kind of humility which takes the lower seat and puts others in the place of ascendancy. But there is no place for false humility which makes you forget who you are.

You are made in God’s image! When he created you he made something that causes even the angels to wonder. As A. W. Tozer has said, “The Lord Jesus Christ did not die for cut worms and plant lice. He died for those who have sinned, but still bear the image of the creator upon their soul.”

Yes, there is that need for genuine humility. But oh, never fall prey to that false humility which carries with it a cheap concept of your worth. For in the eyes of God you have such infinite value that Jesus died for you.

Causes Of This Bogie Man We Call An Inferiority Complex

Psychologists tell us that we begin these feelings of self-distrust when we are still very small. They point out that we come into the world filled with “vim, vigor and vitality.” Then, after a few setbacks, we grow more cautious.

Perhaps we are a little thinner or smaller than the rest of the kids on the block. Or an older sister or brother gets better grades in school and mother and father are continually bragging about them. Or maybe we can’t throw ball as far, or run as fast as some other kids. All of this makes its impression upon us. We get the idea that we just don’t measure up. And, with that first fleeting thought our inferiority complex is born.

Well, all of this may be true. But I think there are even more fundamental causes for the feelings of inferiority that plague us. For one thing, mankind has suffered far too long from what someone has called --

Cosmic Intimidation.

The psalmist expressed it over 3000 years ago as one night he stood on a Judean hillside. The grassy slopes and blushing flowers lay beneath him. Heaven's silver spangled drapery stretched above him. And out of the wonderment that swelled within his soul he cried, “When I considered the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is *man*, thou art mindful of *him*?”

And he had a point! For when we consider the magnitude and grandeur of the universe, it is easy to see why H. L. Mencken concluded that man is “a sick fly on a dizzy wheel.”

We think this world of ours is pretty big, and it is! The scientists tell us that if the God who flung the stars in space could seize this world and toss it into our sun, it would make no more of a disturbance on the surface of the sun, then a pebble dropped into the Gulf of Mexico.

Now that is fantastic enough. But when they begin to talk about the size of the universe as it relates to the speed of light, it is absolutely incredible. For instance, if I were to strike a match and the light were to travel unobstructed, it would flash around the earth seven and a half times in one second. In one-hour, it would travel 630 million miles. In one year, five and a half trillion miles.

No one can understand a trillion. But as one economist pointed out, “A million dollars in \$1,000 bills would stand about 10 inches tall. A billion dollars in \$1,000 bills would be higher than the Empire State building. So a trillion is almost beyond the imagination of man.”

But to bring it a little more into focus, let's climb aboard that beam of light and ride it into space. In a little more than one second we are past the moon. In about nine minutes the sun is far behind us. And then, traveling at the incredible rate of 186,000 miles per second, which is the speed of light, we would ride four years more before we reached the nearest star, Botacentara.

But that's just the beginning. Racing on at the speed of *5 ½ trillion* miles a year, we would have

to go on and on through infinite darkness for 150 billion years before we would reach the end of man's knowledge of the heavens.

And *then*, we would have only gone as far as our most powerful telescopes can see. What lies beyond we do not know. But, as far as astronomers can tell, the celestial universe goes on and on forever. And, in all probability, there is not one universe, but many.

So you can see why one British scientist suggested despairingly, “Astronomically speaking, what is a man?” Compared to the universe in which he lives, man is but a tiny speck on the bosom of immensity.

Well, Jesus knew all about the stars and universe. We're told, “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). But even so, he refused to let man be “astronomically intimidated.” He knew you cannot compare greatness and bigness. God could not love us more if we were 10 feet, 100 feet, or even a thousand feet tall. The real value of something is not in its size...its bulk...its physical measurements. If that were true, a baby would be worthless while a two-ton-Tilly, bulging with layers of fat, would be the paragon of the day.

Our worth is not in our bulk, but in the fact that we were created in the image of God., a little lower than the Angels. Or, as the Hebrew has it, "a little lower than God himself."

One day while preaching to a throng of people, Jesus figuratively picked up this world in which we live in one hand, and holding the soul of man in the other, compared the two and said, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?” There is no comparison between the two, he said. For “man is more than the suns and stars and all the vast revolving systems of mere matter,” he is the crowning the work of God.

To poor, troubled humanity cowering before the impact of cosmic intimidation Jesus said, Get

Rid of that Inferiority Complex. You are made in the image of God...an immortal soul with the power to think and plan and love and choose your destiny. “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, or even the galaxies of all the Galaxies, and lose his soul.”

Not only has man suffered at the hands of cosmic intimidation, he has also been dealt a devastating blow by --

Theological Intimidation.

And to this Jesus also had something to say. Now it's true that man is a sinner and without the grace of God is utterly and completely lost. But in its effort to make people realize their need for redemption, a segment of the church has gone far beyond anything Jesus ever said about the nature of man.

The result, according to J. Wallace Hamilton, is a theological extreme teaching the total depravity of man and “infant condemnation,” that monstrous idea which was a product of the dark ages when the Roman church was in its glory. So depraved and utterly worthless was human nature, they said, that even before babies were born into this world they were damned and cursed. And if they died in infancy without baptism, the church asserted they would roast in hell forever.

Now that sort of monstrous distortion of biblical truth is not dead. Just this week someone told me about a funeral which they attended for a baby who had died without baptism. The opening words of the priest who performed the service were, “I don't know why we're here for this baby is already burning in hell.”

You can imagine the effect of that kind of theological intimidation upon a person's a sense of his or her worth. Constantly bombarded by this twisted, distorted truth in which one is forever being reminded of his total lack of goodness, is it any wonder that man has developed a kind of congenital inferiority complex.

Well, what *did* Jesus say? Did he joined in this theological intimidation of man? On the contrary!

For while he made it perfectly clear that man is lost and in need of redemption, he also said, “God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

You are loved by God, he said. You are the central object of his divine affection. You cannot be utterly worthless if God loves you! So Get Rid of That Inferiority Complex, for God has wagered the whole wide world on the fact that you are worth saving.

Jesus didn't stop at telling us *what* we are: poor, lost, sinners. He went on to remind us about *whom* we are: the central object of the unlimited love of God. Man *is* somebody, Jesus said. He is the object of God's love. No wonder then, that overawed by Christ's astonishing estimate of the incredible worth of man, the poet put his pen to parchment and in a sense of wonder wrote,

"My God, what is a man,
That thou shouldst love him so,
Pouring upon him all thy love,
As if thou hadst nothing else to do?"

Oh, my friends, when you think of the love of God for you, expressed in his willingness to give his son that you might be saved, do you not see there is no place for false humility which allows you to take a cheap view of yourself. Get Rid of That Inferiority Complex. For Jesus said, “God so loved the world... people... *you!*... that he gave his son.”

But there is another source of this widespread malady: the inferiority complex. And that is what I call --

Hereditary Intimidation.

It hasn't done the spirit of man much good to be told his most illustrious ancestor is a monkey. It

hasn't added to his sense of worth to be told his family tree is generously sprinkled with a crude assortment of brutes and beasts.

And yet, for more than a half-century we have been deluged with the views of Darwin and Nietzsche...emphasizing the animal aspects of man...until this special creation of God, this object which he made in his own image, “a little lower than the angels,” has been relegated to a position “a little higher than the apes.” Little wonder we have so much animal behavior today. After being bombarded for a generation with the idea that men are animals, what more can we expect?

If man has slowly slithered up through the slime, the worm, and the brute... then what is sin? It is nothing more than a few lingering splashes of the mud through which he has wallowed.

If the law of the survival of the fittest is true, then what is sin? It is nothing but the remnant of man's determination to survive in the war of the species.

As Dr. Hamilton points out, “Most of our troubles are the result, not of thinking too highly of ourselves, but actually of thinking too cheaply of ourselves.” And then he asks, “Do you suppose people would do the silly, shabby things they do to themselves and others if they really remembered who they are? 'Made a little lower than the Divine'.”

Well, the people of Jesus' day knew nothing of the Darwinian view of man. But they, too, were suffering from hereditary intimidation. They, too, had forgotten who they were. They, too, had lost sight of the fact that they were made in the image of God.

They lived in the world where life was cheap and the dignity of man was a tragic mockery. Because they had no self-respect they had no respect for others. People were pawns to be used for any selfish purpose. And having forgotten who they were, having denied that special loveliness which was themselves, they reduced life to a cutthroat existence.

But, as someone has said, “Instead of condemning their perversities, Jesus began talking about

their possibilities.” He reminded them they were made in the image of God. He told them how important they were in the eyes of God. “Even the hairs on your head are numbered,” he said. “Consider the birds of the air. They sow not, neither do they reap. But your heavenly Father cares for them. Are you not much better than they?” And, as he talked, they heard “whispers of a higher heredity” that caused them to gain a more healthy respect for their own great worth.

Then he went on to say, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Remember, your brother is created in the image of God, too. Give him the same kind of love, honor and respect you would like to receive.

As the meaning of his words sank in, something began to happen down deep inside them. Something so powerful it ultimately shook the mighty Roman Empire from its foundations. Dr. Hamilton describes it this way, “Common people began thinking of *themselves* in higher terms. The slaves and the poor lifted their heads with a new sense of dignity. Everyone was important. Everyone! They began to think of *others* in higher terms as well.

“Because Jesus' hand had been on the leper's head, a new outflow of charity started: hospitals, care of the sick, things like that. Because he had set a child in their midst, all children were vested with a new respect. The old custom in Rome of throwing unwanted babies in the sewers slowed down, stopped. Every person was a somebody. He might be poor, he might be ignorant, the Divine image in him might be sadly marred, but everyone, the last and the least, was an immortal soul for whom Christ had died.”

And it seems to me that one of the great needs of our generation is to hear again the hints of a higher heredity. A heredity that binds us not to the brute, the worm and the slime but to God, to good and to eternity.

We need to remember who we are! Not the product of a biological accident, but the result of a thought of God. Our life and the life of the whole wide world were his idea! When he made us

he put qualities within us that caused even the angels to wonder, for he made us in the image of himself, in the image of God.

Oh, my friend, don't you see that there is no need for you to go through life with a downcast eye. Square your shoulders. Lift up your head. Look life in the face. You bear in your image the stamp of the Divine!

No Cause For Pride

That doesn't mean we can become proud, because we owe our place in the universe to the love of God. I heard a cute story the other day about a young man who went to work for a company as a stock clerk. Within two weeks he was promoted to salesmen. About two months later he became a buyer. Within six months he was vice president. Then one day, after he had been there a year, the president called him into his office, said he was going to retire and wanted him to be his successor.

It was an amazing story of success. From stock clerk to president in one year. And yet, when he was told he would be the new president of the company, the young man didn't say a word. The president looked at him for a moment and said, “Well, aren't you even going to say thank you?” The young man grinned sheepishly and said, “Oh yeah. Thanks dad!”

Well, our unique place in the universe is something like that. It is a pure and simple gift from our Heavenly Father. We owe it all to God! There is no room for the false pride of humanism which leaves God out. Neither is there room for the false humility of an inferiority complex.

When the secularist would intimidate you with a view of man that makes you a product of the slime and mud, remember your “higher heredity,” that you were made in the image of God, a little lower than Divinity. And then act accordingly in the treatment of yourself and others.

When a segment of the church would intimidate you theologically with the distorted doctrine of

the total of depravity of man, making you worse than a brute and beast, remember the words of Jesus, “God so loved people... including you... that he gave his son... not to *condemn* world, but that the world through him might be *saved*.”

When you look at the stars and think of the loftiness of the universe and the littleness of man... do not become astronomically intimidated. Instead, remember how one day Jesus figuratively held that universe in one hand and the soul of man in the other and said, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul.” You are more than suns and stars.

You are *somebody*! So the next time you get caught in the icy grasp of a feeling of inadequacy, Get Rid of That Inferiority Complex by turning to Jesus. Remember what he said about the dignity man, the worth of a soul and the love of God. And, as you hear whispers of your “higher heredity,” the dirge of despondency will give place to a symphony of gladness... and you will thank your God that you are made in *his* image . . . “a little lower than the angels.”