

THE EGO AND I
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Prov. 16:18-19

“The Egg And I” -- or better yet the movie and jocular comments about it -- have captured our attention these past few weeks. And, since preachers are always looking for intriguing sermon subjects, I decided to adapt that movie title to this second sermon in our summertime series on “Skeletons In Our Closet.” So, presto! “The Egg And I” has become “The Ego And I.”

Speaking of catchy titles, there’s a wonderful story about a homiletics professor who was attempting to teach his seminary students the importance of good sermon titles. “If I were on a bus one Sunday morning and it stopped in front of your church,” he said, “would the sermon title you advertised on your bulletin board get me off the bus?”

One by one various students offered various suggestions with that aim in mind to which the professor replied, “That wouldn’t get me off the bus!” Finally, one wise guy suggested the title: “There’s A Bomb On Your Bus!”

Well, enough foolishness, let’s get on with “The Ego And I.” Have you ever tried to dig down and find the cause of the anxiety which sometimes threatens to drive you to distraction? No, I am not begging the question. Ours has been called the age of anxiety, and all of us are plagued at times with inner friction.

There are some folks who manage to hide this fact of life behind a facade of polished composure. But down deep inside they, too, have their moments when life becomes a seething caldron of tensions and frustrations.

That doesn't mean we're all fit candidates for the psychiatrists couch. What it does mean, however, is that every mother's child of us is something of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Each of us is a dualism compromised of the "Ego" and the "I." The person we seem to be and the person we really are. And it's this frightening dualism which is the source of so much of our anxiety.

That's an over-simplification, of course, and over-simplifications are dangerous because they have a way of tempting us to accept answers which are too easy. But, in this instance, I think it's a fair assessment of our problem.

Now it would seem, therefore, that the logical solution would be to arrange a truce so these two parts of our person can live in peaceful co-existence. But that's not possible. Like democracy and communism, by their very nature, the "Ego" and the "I" are adversaries. There is a constant vying for ascendancy between them.

To call a truce will only prolong the agony. Sooner or later the turmoil will boil up again as "The Ego And I" renew their battle for supremacy. The real answer to our problem lies in going to the cause of the dualism itself and, by removing the cause, destroy the effect which is our anxiety.

Well, what *is* the cause of this dreadful dualism? In a word, it is pride! Pride expressed in an unwillingness on our part to face up to the reality of our sin. And let's not kid ourselves, we are sinners!

But, you see, our pride won't let us admit it. It rebels against this judgment of God upon

our words,

our thoughts,

and our deeds.

It prefers our will and our way to God's will and God's way. And so, as an insulation against the heat and light of truth, our pride builds a superficial self which is called our "Ego."

And here we have The Great Pretender in person! For it's our "Ego" that constantly argues
that we aren't so bad after all,
that there are plenty of others who are a thousand times worse,
that their lives are really shady and shoddy,
that we wouldn't think of doing some of the things they have
actually done. And so, under the
persistent,
plausible,
pleading of our pride,
we join little Jack Horner and sit in the corner holding our self-righteous thumb in the sky,
proudly repeating the first clause in our "Ego's" confession of faith: "What a good boy am I!"
And, as long as pride rules the roost, as long as this alter-ego -- this other self -- is in ascendancy,
we are lost and without hope.

Now that should give cause for alarm. But, strangely enough, when pride rules supreme our
hopelessness does not disturb us at all. As a matter of fact, we feel pretty much at ease. We have
little or no sense of need. For, as I've said, pride is The Great Pretender and, when the "Ego" is
given free reign, it quickly creates the illusion that all is well.

How does it accomplish this? Quite simply. The "Ego" is created in the image of the world, and
by the simple expedient of conforming to the world it is able to arrange a truce with the world.
The conflict between good and evil is assuaged and, as a result, an aura of false tranquility settles
upon us. A false sense of well-being is created. And, lost in something akin to an opium
smoker's pipe dream, we float merrily along life's way oblivious to the impending doom which
lies ahead.

There is only one hope for us, and that is, that somehow, someday, God will be able to puncture

the shell of our pride and shuck off the husks of our “Ego,” so that the “I” -- the true self which has been submerged -- can be released to grow.

And this is important! For, while the “Ego” is created in the image of the world and can find a sense of restless peace by conforming to the world, the “I” -- our true self-- is created in the image of God and can find no rest until it rests in Him.

This is God’s great advantage and He uses it with patient skill. By persistent prodding, this Divine Invader searches out the chinks in the armor of our “Ego”. And then, with swift sure thrusts, He dismembers this lesser self until finally -- shorn of our pride -- we are able to see ourselves as we really are: lost and undone apart from God.

The product of ego-centricity is always self-deception. But the denial of “Ego” -- the willful weakening of false pride -- results in self-knowledge. And as the “I” -- the real you, the real me -- emerges, it becomes increasingly aware of its own great, desperate need to be redeemed.

Jesus put it something like this:

“You must lose your life if you would find it again.”

In other words: You must lose the “Ego” to find the “I”.

On another occasion He put it like this:

“A grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die or it will never reach its highest glory.” He was alluding to the resurrection, but it strikes me that there is also a word here for the proud. For, in exactly the same way as a grain of wheat must die in order to become productive so, too, the husks of our pride must die and fall away before the germ of life, which is locked up within each of us, can begin to grow.

So let’s go back for a moment and review what we have learned.

We have seen that the cause of much of our anxiety is this conflict between “The Ego And I” -- between the person we seem to be and the person we really are.

We have also seen that the cause of this dualism is our pride which does not want to face up to the fact of our sin. That’s why pride is known as the primal sin. It is the core of all our difficulties. It is the father of all our pretensions.

It is pride that makes us wear the cloak of imagined sinlessness when all of the facts are to the contrary.

It is pride that makes us ignore the log in our eye while we pick at the sliver in our brother’s eye.

It is pride that makes us set ourselves up in God’s place by rejecting His laws and making our own.

It is pride that makes us live like atheists -- and remember --

True atheism is not arguing there is no God.

True atheism is arguing there *is* a God and then living as if He does not exist!

It is pride that instigates all of these false ideas. That’s why pride is an abomination to the Lord.

For in the words of our text,

“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

And only when we are shorn of our pride and stripped of the robe of our imagined goodness will we ever know what God has always known:

we are nothing,

we have nothing,

and we can do nothing apart from Him.

Oh, to be sure, it hurts to tear off the layers of our conceit. Peeling away the “Ego” which we have worn for so long is a painful process. But that’s the price we must pay. For then, and only then, will we begin to see ourselves as God has always seen us. It is then, and only then, that we begin to use Christ as our measuring stick. Instead of indulging ourselves in the fanciful game of

comparing ourselves with ourselves we begin comparing ourselves with Him, and what we find isn't pretty.

We are like a painting which, when seen in poor light looks pretty good but, when examined under a strong light, reveals its defects. So, too, when we stand in the shadow of our own goodness we can't see the deep defects which mar our soul. We look pretty good! But when we place ourselves under the penetrating light of Christ's example we begin to see that we, too, have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And when that great awakening occurs, we are at what I like to call The Crossroads Of Eternity.

If we make the fatal mistake of giving ear to the siren call of our "Ego", we will sink back into the paralyzing sea of self-deception and we are lost.

If we follow the leading of the "I" -- that part of us which is created in the image of God and can find no rest until it rests in Him -- we will begin the long march up the hill of calvary until at last, in utter humiliation, we cast ourselves upon the love of God in Christ.

It's then that true life begins. For you see, the abundant life which Christ promises is only possible when the "Ego" and the "I" have both been denied and life is centered in *neither* of them, but in Christ. That's what Paul was describing when he said,

"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ living in me."

As long as the "Ego" is supreme and the "I" is submerged, the Divine will be dormant and any hope for life at its best will be nil.

When the "I" is supreme and the "Ego" is submerged there is a ray of hope, for the Divine is at least awakened and the possibility of life at its best is aroused.

But, when the Divine supreme, and the “Ego” and the “I” are both submerged, then there is more than hope. There is the realty of life at its best! For we are free from the towering weight of our wild pretensions and are at peace with God and our self.

That does not happen without a struggle. Every time we take a searching look inside and see the sin which lies buried there, and a conscious longing to be at one with God awakens, our “Ego” is quick to drive such thoughts away.

Even when the battle has been won, and our pride has been harnessed, the conflict goes on. For like a writhing serpent in the throes of death, our “Ego” continues to struggle for supremacy. And the only way to gain and maintain victory over it is to submit daily to the continuing discipline of full surrender by praying the prayer John the Baptist prayed when he came face to face with Christ:

“He must increase and I must decrease.”

Of all the people upon the face of the earth, Christians should be the happiest. But we can never know real joy unless we keep pride under constant surveillance and decide to live maximum Christianity every moment of every day.

As long as we try to carry water on both shoulders,
as long as we indulge our “Ego” in the slightest degree,
as long as we seek to live a double life,
our Christian faith will be a burden and our Christian life will be a chore.

The only way to know real joy in Christ is to cast our self with utter abandonment into the living of the Christian life.

No half way measures will suffice.

No neat compromises with the world will do.

No lukewarm, weak-kneed, milk and water mixture will make it.

It is all or nothing at all!

But when you annihilate your pride to that extent, and center your life in Christ to that degree, you will begin to grasp the true meaning of being a Christian. And, in a paraphrase of the words of Leonard Ravenhill,

“(You will be) free from selfish ambitions, and so (have) nothing to be jealous about.

(You will have) no reputation, and so (have) nothing to fight about.

(You will have) no possessions and, therefore, (have) nothing to worry about.

(You will have) no rights and, therefore, cannot suffer any wrong.

(You will) already (be) dead, so no one can kill (you).”

Now, it’s important to know that kind of Christian experience is not the result of giving up anything! To give up something is to sustain a loss. But the life of full surrender for which I plead this morning is never a loss.

Instead of losing, you gain! Instead of giving up, you exchange! You exchange the chains of your pride and the weight of your sin for that yoke which is easy and that burden which is light. And when that happens the war within is brought to term. The cause of that war -- pride -- is put to death and as a result,

anxieties are banished,

frustrations are resolved,

tensions are released,

and, wonder of wonders, you are at peace.

This morning, as we gather around His table to reflect upon His sacrifice and remember the totality of His self-surrender, I plead with you:

Reject the “Ego”.

Crucify the “I”.

Choose to follow Christ.

And do so, completely!

As you do, you'll begin to get rid of pride -- one of the "Skeletons In Your Closet"-- and start to experience life at its best.

"Oh, the bitter pain and sorrow,
that a time could ever be,
when I proudly said to Jesus,
'All of self and none of Thee.'
"Yet He found me. I beheld Him
bleeding on the accursed tree,
and my wistful heart said faintly,
'Some of self and some of Thee.'

"Day by day His tender mercy
healing, helping, full and free,
brought me lower while I whispered,
'Less of self and more of Thee.'

"Higher than the highest heaven,
deeper than the deepest sea,
'Lord, Thy love at last as conquered.
None of self and all of Thee.'"