

Worse Than You Think & Far Better Than You Ever Imagined

Peter Hiett @ The Sanctuary Downtown

January 23, 2010

[video clip: *Man of La Mancha*]

That was Miguel de Cervantes in the 1972 movie musical, "The Man of La Mancha." I'd never seen it until this week, when my friend Christian loaned it to me.

Cervantes is arrested by the religious authorities for shining light on the inquisition, and claiming the Bible (The Word of God written) is to be read and interpreted by all. He's arrested for heresy. They place Him in a dark prison ... a prison of fear.

Well, that caught my attention, because last week, we preached about the prison of fear called "me." When I'm honest, all my fears are about "me," for I assume that "me" is the Savior. But "me" is not the Savior "I" need.

Now, I need to review something that we spent quite a while talking about last year when we preached on Genesis 2 & 3. "I" and "me." As we preached on extensively last year: In every person there is a mystery that has absolutely stumped anthropologists, psychologists, biologists, physicists, and philosophers. That mystery is **SELF-AWARENESS**... that there is an "I" that observes "me," and that "I" cannot be observed; for the moment "I" observe "I," I have become the "me," that "I" am observing.

Now, please understand, this is far more than philosophical babble. Even physicists are now saying that all reality is dependent on an observer, and I can't observe the observer, for the observer is "I." However, I can observe me. It's like "I" exist in the eternal NOW, but "me" is an object "I" created in time.

Me is my decisions, accomplishments, my work. "Me," to use John and Paul's language in Scripture, is my **flesh**. I create me by "taking." I create my body, my flesh by literally "taking life." Every cheeseburger, every salad is life that I take, which becomes me. But "me," and what the Bible calls "flesh" is not simply a physical reality.

So, I create "me" by taking life (food) for me, and I create "me" by taking credit for me, and "Peter Hiett, Master of Divinity Degree, Pastor at the Sanctuary, Father of four ... "Me." What Scripture calls "The Old Man" ... "The Old Adam."

In Genesis 1, the Snake tempts Eve and Adam, saying, "Take, take from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and make your 'self' - make your 'me' - in God's image." Adam and Eve are already breath of God (Spirit) in dirt. I've wondered if that breath is "I," and that dirt is the beginning of "me." Well, in faithless fear, Adam and Eve try to clothe themselves in more "me."

I'm the same way. "I" make "me."

I make "me" by taking what God says belongs to Him.

I make "me" by taking, and that taking is violence. It's competition.

Now, you may say, "but competition is only natural."

Yes, it is natural in a God-cursed world.

You may say, "but competition is life," and "the survival of the fittest explains life."

No, the survival of the fittest explains **death**,
and death can't create life.

Competition is not life... cooperation is life. But in a fallen world full of fear, I try to save my life at the expense of other lives. Life is cooperation – one member, one cell, one atom serving others. But you see, in a fallen world, I try to save my life, create my life – my flesh – at the expense of other's lives. I try to create my life by consuming death.

So you see, my flesh, my self, my life ... is really a lie. And it's never satisfied. And in the end, it dies.

The problem with my life is that it's life cut off from life. Like I said last time, the problem with my flesh is not that it's physical. It's not that it feels pain or pleasure. It's that it feels only its **own** pain, its **own** pleasure. So, it's a prison of me ... a prison of fear. All about me.

My flesh feels only its own pain, and its own pleasure, except perhaps for a fleeting moment, wherein my flesh becomes one with another's flesh. In the communion of the sacrament of the covenant of my marriage, where for a moment, my bride's pleasure becomes my pleasure, and my pleasure becomes her pleasure. We become one flesh. And miracle of miracles ... it doesn't produce death. It creates **life** ... I mean, babies.

Sexuality is so sacred in our faith, because it's a parable and sign built into our flesh from before the fall, which tells us about life in the Kingdom of God. Yet if I step outside the covenant of my marriage, or begin to compete with my bride – only take from my bride – the window closes, and the sign pointing to heaven starts pointing to hell.

Well, for now, my point is this: "I" create "me" by taking. So, the "me" that "I" create is a thief and a murderer. It is my own prison of fear in a world of fear. The trouble with "me" is "me."

In John chapter 3, Nicodemus (which means "conqueror of the people") is a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrine (that is, an expert at making his "me" with works of

the Law ... that is, the knowledge of good and evil). Nicodemus, a Pharisee, comes to Jesus in the dark. He's afraid, and yet he wants to see the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells him that he must be "born again." Perhaps his "I" must obtain a new "me." He must be "born again," or more precisely, he must be "begotten from above" ... begotten of "water and spirit."

Baptism is water and spirit.

Jesus says, "You must be begotten from above." Then verse 6:

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

We think flesh is real, and spirit is unreal. But nothing is more real than spirit. *"The Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."* There is no prison that can contain Him.

"That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit..."

Then verse 8:

"The wind (Spirit) blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

I create the man of flesh with my will and my control. But I cannot create the man of the Spirit. As John already told us in chapter 1, the children of God are not begotten of the will of man, but of God. But God creates the man of the Spirit with His will and His **WORD**, that once upon a time became flesh.

Verse 16:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish (literally, "not be perished, not be lost"), but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Not **some** of the world. **The world.**

His purpose: To save the world.

That would mean everybody wins.

And that would mean salvation is **not** a competition.

Your eternal life is **not**, is **NOT** dependent on somebody else's eternal death.

Except perhaps that of Jesus ... and He is eternally alive.

So, if you think salvation is a competition, I bet that's your flesh talking. And if you want to ever see the Kingdom of God, you're gonna have to lose it, and get born again. Because the place you're trapped is a prison of fear. It's the edge of hell.

(verse 18):

“Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And what is His name? *Yeshua*. Jesus. It means “God saves,” not “You save.” And “this is the judgment (God saves). “This is the judgment,” the Light. Jesus is the Light.

(verse 19):

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.

They loved the darkness. Not **some** people. People loved the darkness, the prison of self. They loved death and hell.

(verse 20):

“For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”

Like, in communion with God.
That his deeds were done in God.
That he didn’t really do them.
God did them in him, and he was in God.

I remember really wrestling with Scripture one day several years ago. Finally I complained to God, saying, “It’s like you’re saying everything bad in my is **my fault**, and every good in me is to **Your credit**. **Everything I do is bad, and everything You do is good, and I don’t get any credit!**”

All at once ... ding, ding, ding ding dingdingding ... the lights went on.

You see, if I actually believed that ... I would be free.
I would be free of the prison that is me, and not only begotten, but **born** from above.

Now, sorry to do this, but I really want you to see this: the two “me’s” from our study in Genesis 3, remember?

On your left is “The Me That I Create” with my judgments, through my knowledge of good and evil ... the Law. The me that I create is disobedience, darkness, and death. It is emptiness and lies ... the OLD ADAM. I think this is what John refers to as FLESH.

On the right is “The Me That God (I AM) Creates” with His judgment. His judgment is Jesus the Christ and Him crucified ... Grace. It is mercy, light, and life, substance, truth ... the NEW ADAM. I think this is what John would call the man of the SPIRIT.

Now John has just told us:

The Man of Flesh

Loves Darkness

He's an act that hides evil

"I" clothed in my deeds,
fig leaves, and law.

He is a lie.

"Condemned already.

He has already lost.

The flesh is the prison of fear.

The Man of Spirit

Loves Light

He is transparency that reveals Grace

"I" clothed in the Righteousness of Christ.

HE is the Truth

Eternal and indestructible*

He has already won.

The Spirit Man is the household of faith.

*[I Peter tells us we're born of "indestructible seed... through the Word of God."
Paul says we're already seated with Christ]

"What's born of flesh is flesh and what's born of Spirit is spirit."

So which one are you?

Well, if you're a believer, and you still live in this world ... **You're BOTH.**

That means, you're worse than you think... and far better than you ever imagined.

But nothing in-between.

One "me" has already lost everything, and one "me" has already won everything.
But there is no "me" that needs improving, and there is no "me" at risk of failing.
There is no "me" to worry about.

"For what's born of flesh is flesh, and what's born of Spirit is spirit."

Flesh doesn't turn to spirit, and spirit doesn't turn to flesh. However, just like light shines in the darkness, Spirit is revealed in the midst of flesh, and the man of Spirit is begotten within the man of flesh. Indeed, the flesh is like the space, or the womb in which the Spirit is revealed.

See, flesh is displaced by Spirit, but flesh can't create Spirit. Death is displaced by life, but death can't create life. Disobedience is displaced by Mercy, darkness by Light, lies by Truth, fear by Faith, and old man by New.

And the shape of my emptiness becomes the shape of His Fullness. So I sing,
"Amazing Grace that saved a wretch like me" ... a particular unique, old sinful me becomes a particular unique new me, filled with grace through faith. A new me, no longer composed of faithlessness and fear, but composed of faith, hope, and love – the life of God.

But for now, “I” has two “me’s.” One that needs to be disposed of (washed away), and one that needs to be revealed.

After this, Jesus and His disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.

Baptism symbolizes the washing away of old me, and the revelation of new me ... Grace.

(Verse 23):

John (the Baptist) was also baptizing at Aenon (which means “where you can see”) near Salim (which means “peace”) [Aenon near Salim ... “where you can see peace.”] because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). Now a discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness – look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.

The disciples of John are afraid, because they’re competing with Jesus.

Are you afraid? Maybe it’s because that **old you** is competing with Jesus. Maybe you think you’re the savior.

(verse 27):

John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”

“I can’t receive even one thing,” except by Grace ... sheer Grace. Not even one thing. Not even myself. And if I think I can, I’m a liar, lost and condemned already. You see, the old man is really an empty illusion, nothing but lies. And the new man is nothing but grace, all gift.

So if I’m honest, what could I boast of?

A man suffering from an inferiority complex went to a psychologist. The psychologist ran some tests, called the man back in and said, “Good news! It’s not a complex. You really are inferior!”

We’re all equally inferior before Jesus. We’re dead. And the thing that’s alive is Jesus. What could I be ashamed of or embarrassed about? Soren Kierkegaard wrote: “It’s a consoling idea that before God, we are always in the wrong.” Yes, it is.

Anything that you think you alone are responsible for creating is evil illusion and condemned already. Don’t hide it, confess it and be free of it. And why am I anxious? I have no “me” that needs justifying, defending, or even improving. And

why do I despair? One self is condemned already, and one is indestructible perfection.

Thomas Merton writes, "Despair is the extreme of self-love [old-me love]. But a man who is truly humble cannot despair, because in the humble man there is no longer any such thing as self-pity."

Why feel sorry for a lie, and why feel sorry for perfection? Whenever I'm proud or boastful, ashamed, anxious, or despairing ... whenever I'm afraid, I'm believing a lie that I think is Me.

I don't need to defend the lie, I just need to let it die.
I don't need to fight the darkness, I just need to turn on the light.

One more question: How could I ever compete? What would I compete with? My old man has already lost, and my new me has already won **everything**.

In I Corinthians 3, St. Paul asks, "Why are you competing?" Then in verse 21: "*So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours ... and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*" See? Everything is Grace. So there is only NOTHING you can compete for, and that nothing is your prison of fear ... the suburbs of hell.

So John the Baptist saw the Savior and refused to compete.

(Verse 28):

"You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete."

In those days, the friend of the bridegroom would guard the wedding chamber. I've read that he would listen for the groom, for the groom would call out when the marriage was consummated. Then, the friend of the bridegroom would announce this good news to all the guests, who would party into the night. For the groom had clothed his bride with himself ... his body and blood.

Jesus came to deliver us from our old, dead selves, and clothe us with Himself. So John says, "Far be it from me ... far be it from you ... far be it from any religious system, doctrine, or work of men to compete with the Bridegroom of Grace.

(Verse 30):

"He must increase, but I must decrease."

John is the last and greatest of the Old Covenant prophets. In the Old Covenant, it's like God says, "Adam, you want to make yourself in my image? Well, here's the Law – give it a whirl. Try making yourself in my image."

Jesus (Matthew 11:11) tells us, "John is the greatest of those born of woman (the first birth), and yet Jesus also says (John 10:8) "All who came before me are thieves and robbers." See? Religion takes credit from God and His Word, who is "The Bridegroom of Grace" ... the New Covenant.

So John saw the light and said, "*He must increase, and I must decrease.*" "Jesus must increase." But now, where does he increase, Nicodemus? Where is He begotten, and where is He born? In You ... in You ... He's the Seed implanted in You. So, there is an old man in me I must never defend, and there is a New Man in me for Whom I should never apologize, and about Whom I should never feel ashamed.

Sometimes I've prayed and sometimes I've preached, and Jesus has shown up with such power that it's scared me. Because my old man feels responsible, and I think to myself, "I can't do that." Well, of course I can't do that. But Jesus can do that.

Someone will say, "That sermon changed my life," and I panic and say, "Oh, it was nothing." WRONG. It was Jesus born in my nothing. You each have gifts of the Spirit. It's Jesus at work in your nothing. But it's not nothing.

Sometimes I'll testify or preach and people will hate me... Religious people have called me a heretic, written me hate-filled anonymous letters. Hate.

John 7:7 – Jesus said, "*If you're of the world, the world cannot hate you.*"

John 15 – "*If the world hates you, know that it hated me first.*"

The world hates Jesus in me, and Jesus in you.

Well, if your old man feels responsible for Jesus, you'll hide him under a bushel. Don't hide your light under a bushel of shame. There is a new man in you for whom you must not apologize and never feel shame, and an old man in you that you must never defend and always deliver to death.

So you might ask, "How do I know the difference? How do I judge between?!" Well, you don't judge. But you expose them both to Judgment. Jesus told us, "This is the Judgment – the Light." The old man hates the light, and is destroyed by light. The New Man runs to the light to exhibit God's grace.

If someone accuses you of something, say "Let's look at it."

If it's the old man, say: "It's worse than you thought!"

That's my old man!

Let's kill him!"

If it's the new man, say: "It's Jesus.

He is offensive at times,

But He's always good."

So John says, "I must decrease." How do I decrease? You can't cast out fear with fear. You can't eliminate darkness with more darkness. You can't clean the self with more self. You can't improve the flesh with more flesh. How do I decrease? **He**

must increase, and He is the Light. He is the Judgment on my old man that saves me from my old man. I can't save me with me, for it's me that I must be saved **from**.

So I don't strive to make old me better ... I turn on the LIGHT! I don't try to clean him up, I deliver him to Judgment. I don't fix my sin ... I confess my sin, and believe God's grace. And God's grace is a new me. I must see who I truly am to be rid of who I truly am not.

What I'm saying is that a Christian is not saved or sanctified by works of the Law in the power of the flesh, but by grace working through Faith. In the words of Paul, *"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me."*

In other words, Jesus is my new "me." And as I believe that reality, my life is lost, and His life is manifest in me. I must see who I truly am to be rid of who I truly am not. And who I truly am is revealed in Jesus. He is faith, hope, and love in me... on me. I'm clothed in His righteousness.

1 Corinthians 1:30 – God has made Him my wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Jesus gives me His life, His Me, and I become one spirit with Him, says Paul. And this is not a temporal, fading dream, but eternal reality.

In the "Man of La Mancha," Cervantes is thrown into a prison of fear. The other prisoners threaten to tear him to pieces, but he asks that they judge after he tells them a story. But more than just telling the story, he has them act out the story. It's the story of an old man who appears to go mad, and imagines that he's a brave knight named Don Quixote. He imagines that he's a brave knight, and he imagines that the town prostitute is his fair lady, Dulcinea.

It's almost like imagining that you are the body of Christ, and the people around you are actually His bride. To really believe that will look like madness in this world.

A fellow in the story comments, "mad men are God's truth." And a priest comments, "I think Jesus must've been mad." Well, the old man in the story thinks he's Don Quixote, who dreams the impossible dream, who fights the unbeatable foe, who bears with unbearable sorrow, who runs where the brave dare not go, who rights the unrightable wrong, who loves pure and chaste from afar, who is willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause. And this is not a duty... it's a privilege. The joy of fearless and faithful love... the image of God.

Don Quixote sees the world not as it is, but as it should be. He sees himself not as he is, but as he should be. He sees the town prostitute not as she is, but as she should be. You realize, the world as it should be is the world as it is in eternity, and "I" as I should be is "I" as I am in eternity. "You" as you should be is "you" as you are in eternity... not a thief or a murderer, not a harlot, but the bride of Christ.

Now this clip is what those people in prison are imagining. They are imagining Alonso imagining that he is Don Quixote, who is imagining that Aldonza is the fair virgin Dulcinea. To choose to imagine what is eternally true is called Faith.

[clip #2 - "The Man of La Mancha]

Well, Alonso looks like an old fool. Yet with his faith, he changes the world, and he convinces Aldonza the prostitute that she's really Dulcinea, which means "sweetness." Then at one point, Dulcinea convinces him he really is Don Quixote. Then, he acts like Don Quixote, and she like Dulcinea. And just by telling the story of Don Quixote and Dulcinea ... like telling the story of Jesus and His Bride ... By telling the story in the prison of fear, Cervantes convinces the prisoners that they are far more than thieves and murderers, and they **become** more than thieves and murderers.

By the time Cervantes leaves, the prison of fear becomes a household of faith.

[clip #3 - "The Man of La Mancha]

I know that's kind of hokey. But you know, this world is like a prison of fear, just as our old selves are like prisons of fear. But we gather each Sabbath and tell a story, even act it out ... we sing some songs and remind each other Who Jesus is and Who He says we really are.

He dreams the impossible dream.
He fights the unbeatable foe.
He bears the unbearable sorrow.
He runs where the brave dare not go.
He rights the unrightable wrong.
He marched into hell for a heavenly cause.
And the world is much better for this:
That one Man, scorned and covered with scars...

We cannot turn ourselves into Jesus, yet by grace through faith, Jesus turns Himself into us. He tells us who we really are – no longer thieves, but sons; no longer a harlot, but His Bride.

So, you on your own are far worse than you think. And yet, you as you **really are**, are far better than you know. You don't change by trying to make your old self better, you change by confessing that old self, and receiving that new self by grace through faith. You have an old "me" that you have created in fear, and you have a new "me" that God gives you by grace through faith. Soon, you'll see that the old me is the dream ... the bad dream ... and the new me is no dream, but eternal reality.

So on the night He was betrayed by all, He took bread and broke it, saying, "This is

my body, given to you. Take and eat. And in the same manner after supper, he took the cup, saying, "This is the New Covenant in my blood. Take and drink.

You see,

"He dreamt the impossible dream.

He fought the unbeatable foe.

He bore the unbearable sorrow.

He ran where the brave dared not go.

He righted the unrightable wrong.

He marched into hell for a heavenly cause.

And the world is much better for this: One man, scorned and covered with scars."

He is the Man of Faith, and He gives His faith to you. He bears your old life to destruction, and He gives you His life as your own.

In the morning, He would bear your sin to crucifixion.

When you feel fear, embarrassment, pride, or envy, it's your old man. So, look to the cross, where he's crucified with Christ. Preach to yourself: "I am no longer that 'me'." And when you feel fear, and the way seems impossibly hard, remember this table. He gave you His life, and all things are possible for Him. Remember: "I am clothed in Him."

Now, real fast ... we have to finish John 3:

"He who comes from above (another) is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

How many receive His testimony? NONE!!

Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

How many does the wrath of God remain on? ALL!! For **NONE** receive His testimony.

According to this paragraph:

*None are saved

*All are condemned

"Yet God so loved the world..." The **WORLD**.

So, all are condemned, but He desires all to be saved. To “me,” that sounds like an impossible dream. But when the disciples ask Jesus, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus said, “With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Your old man can't do it, religion can't do it. But the NEW man? That's another story.

See? He is asking you to live His story. (And in the words of Don Quixote) It's not a duty, it's a privilege.

So come to the table. Surrender your life, and receive His life.

Dream His dreams.

It's called faith.

And all His dreams come true.