



There Is More to You Than You Think

Can You Spare Some Time to Think About Yourself?

If I were to ask you who Michelle Obama is, what would you say? She was the First Lady, the wife of former President Obama. She is a mom. Mrs. Obama is a lawyer, a graduate of Harvard Law School. She is widely recognized in the U.S. as the most admired woman in America. Michelle Obama is an advocate for the poor and has devoted much of her time to promoting healthy eating and lifestyles. But is that all she is? Is she the sum of her accomplishments? How about Jack Ma? Who is he? He is one of the twenty wealthiest people in the world. He is known for his great success in business and has given millions of dollars to help underprivileged communities around the world. He is the founder of Alibaba the online business to business marketplace site. He is married and has three children but is there not much more to Jack Ma than that? Who is Sonia Sotomayor? She is the first Hispanic member of the US Supreme Court. She graduated from Yale Law School and was appointed by both Republican and Democratic presidents to court positions. Judge Sotomayor is divorced and as a young child lost her father. Is that who she is? The Apostle Paul was one of the greatest Christian missionaries of all time. He wrote much of the New Testament and most think he was married although we have no record of him having any children. Yet is that how you would define him? Is that who Paul is?

The Apostle has an interesting way of identifying himself. **As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.** (Ephesians 4:1-2 NIV) He literally was a prisoner, not just as he was writing the letter but numerous other times also. Yet he's not referring to himself as a prisoner of the Romans but rather of Jesus and that is a most fascinating way of identifying himself. There was nothing good about being a prisoner. It was demeaning and dehumanizing. And that would seem to be the implication Paul is making about being Christian. It tears you down, it ruins your life. Paul though didn't see being a prisoner quite the same as most of us. Ponder how many ways you also are a prisoner. You are imprisoned within your body. You can't get out of it and relocate. Your body makes you localized. You are always here and never there. The body keeps you from being at two places at once. You are a prisoner of your mind. You think within it and no where else. You might try to get someone else's perspective but you are trapped in the mind you have. You are a prisoner of time. The time you are in is where you must be. You can't relocate to another time if you don't like the one where you are. You are a prisoner just like I am and you have gotten used to it. Not only that, but it is also what makes you who you are...it is life, .being a prisoner is your identity. Paul says he's a prisoner of the Lord and that He implies is a wonderful gift.

Just consider one aspect of this being a prisoner of the Lord. He alone is your Savior and you cannot go outside of Him for that. He is the only way to eternal life, the only one to take out of you your sin, the only Savior to make you perfect and complete. When you put your hope in Jesus for salvation, you become a prisoner of that salvation, a prisoner of Heaven and of a joyful everlasting life. You are held within the salvation of Christ and the best God has is yours. Is that like being trapped? Perhaps, if that is how you see things. I would call it freedom!

Paul says that the life you have in Christ is built on humility. "Be completely humble...", he tells us. This was a strange revelation back in Paul's time. Humility was never viewed in a positive light. All of society was structured vertically. Much like the caste system in India, the entire ancient world was built on a pecking order of status that was real and visible. Slaves were at the bottom, the rich and the powerful at the top. Where you were on the order of status determined how you were treated and how you treated others. Humility was the lowest of values given over to slaves. They were humble only because they had to be, not because they saw it as a positive trait to possess. There was no religion at that time or before that valued humility. Teachers and philosophers despised humility. Humility was the sign of failure, of disgrace, a loathsome place in life. The one who was humble was a fool, an outcast, a lost soul.

We see humility today as a virtue but only because Christianity came to the world. The humble were mocked and scorned and when Jesus told His followers to be humble, it was a revolutionary thought. Listen carefully to the instruction of Jesus. **Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."** (Mark 9:35 NIV) Imagine the Pope and his Cardinals announcing they were all Baptists in practice and faith. It would have been shocking like that. Or picture the leaders of the Republican and Democratic parties telling the members to have a great big group hug and stop putting down one another. That would have been it. Consider how you would feel if you heard that Taiwan and mainland China got together and happily formed a democratic union. That's how shocking it was to consider. To choose to be a servant was as despised universally as choosing to live in a mudhole with pigs. No man or woman in her right mind would decide to freely be a servant of all or be humble if it wasn't necessary to get something.

Yet that is exactly what Jesus said His people do. They are prisoners of humility. It is the controlling factor of how they get along. It is what makes them who they are. Servants. It is not the route of Christianity hunting for opportunities to have your way, working at getting your opinion heard, looking for honor. I'm not great at humility or serving; it doesn't come naturally for me. Only Christ in me can make it work, can make humility operational, functional. Yet, humility is the highest form of personality, of being. If I were to ask you who you are, would a servant come to mind...a joyful and glad to have it part of me servant? On your real life resume, the one that actually describes you, would humble and servant-like have a prominent spot?

If you were to ask me who my hero in the Bible is, I could name a hundred of them but besides Jesus, one stands out to me. You may not have ever heard of him. Rarely is his name ever brought up in Bible studies or sermons. Listen to what the Apostle Paul had to say about Epaphroditus. **But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.** (Philippians 2:25-30 NIV)

That is essential Christianity. It is how it looks when you walk with God. Epaphroditus is the sort of Christian Jesus wants you to be. Your mind on how to serve others. Your heart devoted to the welfare of those God puts in your life. Your loyalty to Him and His people. Never decide that a cause or a mission rises above these two simple commands. Love God with all your heart, mind and soul and love your neighbor as yourself. To follow these two commands, you must be humble and a servant. Who are you? If you are in Christ, if your faith is in Him and you have been transformed by His salvation into a new Creation, then you are humble. You are a servant. Your greatest endeavor, above all others you might attempt, is when you are a servant and your best response, regardless of where you are, is to be humble. And Jesus will smile.

