

The Ugly Tyrant of Self

by E.A. Johnston

E.A. Johnston's sermon emphasizes the necessity of crucifying self to live a life that truly pleases God.

Duration: 19:13

Scripture: Isaiah 14:12, Romans 8:8, Romans 12:1

Topics: "Self"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses the metaphor of a dark cave to represent the presence of the 'ugly tyrant of self' in our lives. This tyrant emerges from the shadows and disrupts our peace, often becoming violent and selfish. The preacher emphasizes that when we let this tyrant have its way, we cannot please God. He urges listeners to recognize and crucify the self on a daily basis, as American Christians tend to cater to self rather than crucify it. The sermon also highlights the importance of living for God and not for ourselves, referencing verses from Romans and 2 Corinthians.

Transcript

Picture in your minds, friends, a hillside with a cave. The entrance to the cave is darkened. All you see are shadows, and it is a cave that you are quite familiar with because you pass by it every single day of your life.

Most of the time you seldom ever take notice of it, but occasionally there are more than mere shadows in the cave. At times there is a dark figure there. He is repulsive to look upon, and he is menacing to behold.

At times this dark menacing figure grows violent, and he takes a club in his hand and swings it about wildly, striking out at anyone in his path. You are very familiar with this menace in the mouth of that cave. He emerges from time to time and disrupts the domestic peace you normally enjoy.

You wish he would just stay in the shadows of that cave and never come out again, but he is a tyrant, and he will do what he wants to do when he wants to do it, for he is used to getting his way because he is the ugly tyrant of self. Listen, friends, I believe that our biggest enemy is not so much the pole of this world nor the devices of the devil, but rather our biggest enemy we face on a daily basis is the enemy of self. I will often hear Christians make the following comment, Satan's been attacking me every day this week.

Well, out of all the billions of people on this planet, I doubt seriously, friend, that you are important enough for Satan to pay a personal visit to on a regular basis. No, I don't believe we're facing the devil personally

as much as we think we are. The devil is not an omnipresent being.

He can only be in one place at any given time. I can only recall one time in my entire life where I felt I was up against Satan personally. His presence was very real and threatening.

I was surrounded by the presence of his evil darkness. I felt the onslaught of his unrelenting hatred of me. I faced his unleashed malice against me.

It was also very real and dark, and that was the day of my wife's tragic death. Since that time, I've recognized the bothersome minions of Satan, but not him personally. No, friends, my biggest enemy who I face each day is not Satan but self, the ugly tyrant in the cave.

He is a ever-present nuisance to me. Self often raises his ugly head. He is indeed a hideous monster.

He is my biggest enemy. And I believe, friend, that if you are honest with your own self, you too will admit that your biggest enemy is self as well. Is that not true? We live in a self-absorbed society.

I think when historians look back on this decade, they will refer to it as the self-decade, the decade of the selfie. Self is king today. Even religion gears itself towards self.

Christian publishers admit that their biggest sellers are self-help books, and when many Christians pray in a meeting, they cannot wait for their turn so they can draw attention to self. Even our worship services are more focused on the performer rather than God and his majesty. Our gospel message today is a man-centered gospel focused on the happiness of man and the gratification of self.

And our pulpits are full of self, self on display. I'm no longer shocked anymore about preachers who mainly talk about themselves when they preach. They are their favorite topic.

It's kind of sickening to listen to them, and many of their listeners are like the Greeks who came to Philip and asked, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. I remember J. Sidlow Baxter commenting, How can a man, full of himself, preach to Christ, who emptied himself? Many serve in some capacity in church so that they will be acknowledged. Many swell up with pride when they announce they are a deacon at such and such Baptist church.

And I've seen the worst in the best of men. Listen, friends, the best of men are only men at best. Donald Gray Barnhouse was a top theologian and famous pastor in his generation.

But if a waitress brought him a meal that was cold, he would scream at her at the top of his lungs. Even the saintly George Whitfield struggled with self. He was a perfectionist who would grow visibly upset if a chair was out of place or his gloves weren't put in their proper drawer.

He made an apology one time after berating one of his servants who was late with his meal. He hoped that he wouldn't live to be an old man that people would grow tired of. I know for a fact, friends, that the biggest enemy I face every day of my life is my own self.

Self has to have his own way. Self has to be acknowledged. Self has to be or the ugly tyrant of self comes out of his cave waving a club in his hand.

Now you might think that illustration is amusing because it's so true. The title of my message today, friends, is the ugly tyrant of self. And my text is the book of Romans.

You can turn in your Bibles there now. Our text is Romans chapter eight and will be in verse eight. Let me read that to us now.

So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Now that's a true statement, friends. When you were in the flesh, when you were letting the ugly tyrant of self have its way, you cannot please God.

I believe this sermon could bring some benefit to you if you can stand it long enough to recognize the ugly tyrant of self in your own life, friend. And then, with God's grace, do something about it. A self has to be nailed to the cross on a moment-by-moment basis or it will rear its ugly head.

And like our text in Romans declares, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. How can I please God if self is on display? How can I please God if I'm trying to please myself? How can I please God if I must first please myself? Jesus said, I do those things which always please the Father. But for the average believer, we do those things which always please ourselves.

I want you to take a piece of paper, friends, and a pen and write down a word for me. Will you do that? Take out a piece of paper and a pen and write the word selfishness. Go ahead and do that now if you can.

Now take your pen and circle the letter I in the middle of that word. Did you do that? Notice how the letter I is central to the word selfishness. And when self rears its ugly head in my life, it is the I that is predominant.

And when I am at the center of my existence, then I am being selfish. I want my own way. I want it now.

I, I, I, I, self is a monster, friend. Well, how do we deal with the ugly tyrant of self? I seldom today. Will we hear a sermon on the subject? You'd be hard-pressed, friend, to hear a message today on the crucified life or the cross and the life of a believer.

However, it seems that most sermons are geared to entertain self rather than to provide a means to crucify self. Crucifixion is painful and a distasteful subject at best, but the Christian life friend is lived via the cross. Self must get up on that cross.

That is true Christianity. Religion doesn't mind gathering around the cross, but true Christianity gets up on that cross. A crucified Christ must have crucified followers.

Chinese Christians understand this principle because they face continual persecution for their faith in Christ Jesus. But American Christians do not feel comfortable with the message of the cross and the life of the believer. American Christians are accustomed to catering to self rather than crucifying it.

If you don't believe me, just sit in on the next deacon committee at your church next month and sit back and watch the ugly tyrant of self emerge from his cave with his club in his hand. I remember what my late homiletical mentor, Dr. Stephen F. Olford, told me one time. He was telling me about Romans 12.1 where the Apostle Paul states, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And Dr. Olford looked at me and began to talk about the Jewish offerings and how the priest would lay the living sacrifice upon the altar and how they would have to fasten flesh hooks in the body of that animal so it would not crawl off the altar. And Stephen Olford said in a very solemn tone, that is what we need, flesh hooks, to be on that altar continually or else we will crawl off it as well. Modern Christianity has at its very

center self.

But when I pick up my Bible, I see just the opposite. Jesus declared in Matthew 16 and verses 24 and 25, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

I believe, friends, the key statement in those words of Christ are, let him deny himself. For that's the Christian life in a nutshell. Like I said, the Christian life, friends, is lived via the cross.

A crucified Christ must have crucified followers. Let me ask you a question, friend. Do you recognize the ugly tyrant of self in your own life? Do you see self as your biggest enemy? When you are in a prayer meeting and it's time for you to pray, do you pray to the ears of men to impress them? When you serve in your church, are you doing that so you can receive congratulations and compliments? Do you like to boast and brag about what you have and what you've done? Can you see the ugly shadow of the monster of self looking over your shoulder as it peers out of that cave as you go on endlessly speaking about yourself? Do you take pride when you announce to someone that you were a deacon or a pastor or you were Dr. So-and-so? Let me ask you another question about taking the focus off of you.

Are you repulsed when you see self on display in others? Do you have a friend that when you get together with them for lunch, they go on endlessly speaking about only of themselves? It's funny how most folks don't even notice that they are full of self, that they are into self-glory and self-recognition. Often, a self-righteous church member will fail to recognize this tyrant of self in their life, even though it's obvious to all around them that self is on display. But the ugly tyrant of self is not only repulsive to others, it's more hideous when recognized in our own lives.

We can trace this element of self back to Satan, as seen in the book of Isaiah in chapter 14 in verses 12 through 15. Listen, friends, to the five satanic declarations of I will found in this passage. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning? How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations? For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven.

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will also sit upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.

I will be like the Most High, yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. When we assert self into our daily activities, we are acting more like the devil than Christians. The Christian life is the antithesis of a self-centered existence.

Listen to Paul's words from 2 Corinthians in chapter 5 and verse 15. And he died for all, that they which live should live only for themselves. Isn't that what it says? That's what we think it says.

Let me read it again, what Paul really wrote. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again. In other words, a Christian should not live for herself or for himself, but rather should be dead to self.

I want to read you a letter, friends, written by C.T. Studd when he was a missionary in China. It's only a paragraph long. It was written the 22nd of August, 1885.

Here now are his words. I have come through many trials, and the Lord has taught me many lessons, especially out of my own weakness, how my best powers and attainments can hinder him, that if I live and

do, I must be a hindrance to his working through me. Yes, I must be dead, then he can use me for his glory.

Galatians 2.20. Yes, dead, dead, dead, dead to everything, dead to everybody, dead to the opinions not only of the world, but also of the Christian world. Peter was not dead to the opinions of his fellows, and he fell and was rebuked by Paul. This latter lesson is the special one that the Lord has been teaching me.

Well, there you have it, friends. The ugly tyrant of self must go to the cross. There he must be nailed up, and there he must stay.

Listen, friend, God cannot use you as he intends to use you until self goes to that cross. Self must get up on the altar of sacrifice, flesh hooks and all, if this is your desire, dear friend. Let me lead us in prayer right now.

Great God, do such a work of sanctifying grace in my life that self is crucified and you are glorified. When self rises up, when that ugly tyrant of self rises up, nail it, Lord, nail it to the cross. Give me the grace to stay on that altar of sacrifice.

Fashion your flesh hooks in me to such a degree that I cannot crawl off that altar. I want to flesh out Romans 12, 1 in my life, Lord, and be a living sacrifice for you and your great glory. Prune away all exposed branches of my hindering self-life.

Purge away all hidden areas of my self-life. Burn away the useless dross of my life, dear Savior. Mold me and shape me into the person you want me to be.

You are the powder. I am just the clay. Have your way with me, Lord.

Make me a fit vessel that you can use for your great glory. Amen.

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