

THE REAL ME: Life Inside

Could anyone ever imagine that Quasimodo and Marilyn Monroe might have something in common? Quasimodo was an ugly man. That hunchback who lived in the Paris Cathedral of Notre Dame was so deformed that all those who saw him were disgusted or frightened by his grotesque appearance. He lived high up among the deafening bells in the towers of Notre Dame, the victim of societal and self-imposed exile.

Marilyn Monroe seemed quite the opposite. She was stunningly beautiful with blonde hair, a lovely figure and an attractive face. She lived among the stars of fame and fortune.

But they did have something in common. Both Quasimodo of Paris and Marilyn Monroe of Hollywood were judged by the way they looked on the outside. People could not see the love and sensitivity and beauty beneath the surface of the hunchback's misshapen body. Nor could gawkers see the hurts and fears and insecurities inside the beauty queen.

We all know how incorrectly we are judged by those who see only our outside and never get to see the real us on the inside. There have been times when my outward appearance has caused people to miss-by-a-mile the real me on the inside. A neat outside appearance has caused them to misunderstand the disheveled inside. Smiles have often hidden the hurts in the heart. Trappings of religion on the outside have disguised the sinner who is underneath.

Perhaps you, too, have looked into a mirror and said, "Is that the real me?" At times I have wondered if somehow I slipped into the wrong body. The real me wouldn't look like this. The real me would be a few years younger, several pounds lighter and much better looking.

The search for the real 'me' is nothing new. People have been doing that through all of time. Let me take you back to the Old Testament book of I Samuel. The Hebrew people had once again asked God for a king and God gave them Saul. He was striking! I Samuel 9:2 tells us that he was "an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites."

Saul was a winner on the outside, but he was a loser on the inside. So when divine patience ran out, God called the prophet Samuel and told him to anoint a new king. Samuel feared execution for treason if he obeyed God's order . . . but he did it anyway. He went to an obscure little Israeli village called Bethlehem, where he was led by God to the house of Jesse.

We pick up the story in I Samuel 16:6 where Samuel invited Jesse's family to a sacrifice:

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord."

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The Lord has not chosen this one either." Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The Lord has not chosen these." So he asked Jesse,

"Are these all the sons you have?"

"There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep."

Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."

So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.

At issue here was the real person. Not the outside, but the inside. That's why God told Samuel, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man

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Ours is an outside-in society. We tend to judge and be judged by our age and weight and looks and gender and position in society. People rate one another by clothes, complexion and a catalogue of other outside appearances. We may bemoan such superficiality, but what else can we do? All we have to go by is the outside because we are not God who is able to see the inside.

The problem is that we mistakenly live the way we are judged! Since others are constantly looking at our outside, we start to think it is the most important. We are deceived to believe that the ‘real us’ is the way we look rather than who we are. Our appearance becomes all-important and our hearts become unimportant. How we feel, think and believe on the inside is increasingly controlled by what happens on the outside. It is the root of most of our problems.

But there’s a better way! Rather than live outside in, we should begin to live inside out.

There are some questions that help us understand this. The first question: Who is the real me? The ‘seen’ me is the composite of all the externals such as age, gender, height, weight, the color of hair and eyes and skin, voice, complexion, jewelry, clothes, posture, health and handicaps. Often there is comparatively little we can do to change what others see.

We diet to look thinner, but most regain the weight. Some studies indicate that the recovery from obesity is at a lower rate than recovery from heroin addiction!

We spend large amounts of time and money on beauty treatments to alter what people see, but does it make a difference? Magazines run ‘makeovers’ to show the difference a full-scale beauty treatment can make. Often the difference isn’t much. Some magazines run the “before” picture in black-and-white and the “after” picture in color to make the contrast greater.

Not that care of our bodies isn’t important. It is. But Paul said it right in I Timothy 4:8 when he wrote that “physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

Think of how much of life and its resources go into the outer us that people see. At the same time, remember that the outer us is only temporary. Given enough time, our clothes will tear, our voice will crack, our skin will wrinkle and our hair will thin. We know this, but we still are prone to think that the real us is seen on the outside rather than being secret on the

inside! The truth is that the real me is the unseen, secret me.

Arthur Wellesley, the Iron Duke of Wellington, was asked to explain his British victory over Napoleon at Waterloo. He said, “The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.” Eton is the preparatory school where most of the British officers were educated.

So it is with us. The battles of our lives are won or lost on the playing fields of our secret selves. It is what we are and believe and think on the inside that determines our victories and our defeats on the outside.

The Bible teaches that our secret selves are sinners. Jesus spoke forcefully about this when he told the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 23:27, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean”.

Even more specifically, Jesus explained in Mark 7:21-23 the difference between the inside and outside when he said, “From within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evil things come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”

We know what Jesus is talking about because we know our secret selves. We know that it’s possible to seem truly virtuous on the outside while feeling lust or anger or hatred on the inside. What’s real is the unseen secret us on the inside!

Does it always have to be that the outside looks okay and the inside is terrible? No, not at all! It was Peter who wrote specifically to women in I Peter 3:3-4 and said:

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.

This woman who may or may not be a physical beauty but she is a spiritual beauty. Regardless of how she looks outside, she’s gorgeous inside. And it’s what’s inside that counts!

Which brings us to a second question: Are you living outside-in or inside-out? Jesus shared an outside-in/inside-out conversation with a woman by a Samaritan well. In John 4:7-26 we see the difference

between her outside-in approach and Jesus' inside-out approach to life:

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for

salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

Do you notice the difference? She was concerned about water from the well, racial differences between Samaritans and Jews, five former husbands and the guy she's now living with and where to worship.

Jesus switches the center of reality to the inside. He talks about water for the eternal soul, morality of relationships and worshiping God regardless of location.

The woman at the well was a modern person in ancient times. Today we are concerned about the food we eat and the water we drink, but we neglect the spiritual deserts of our secret souls. We are prone to move in and out of marriages and living together, but we fail to give priority to the morality of the real us on the inside. We get all hung-up on the right denomination or church building while missing out on the inner worship of God in spirit and truth.

Outside-in living is a bummer! We become like corks in the sea, floating wherever the waves of outer circumstances take us. It is

a life of ups-and-downs, extremes of agony and ecstasy - - - resulting from lives that have given priority to the outside and neglected the inside.

Quite the opposite of the Samaritan was a man named Stephen. He lived inside out. His story is told in Acts 6 and 7. In Acts 6 he was performing miracles and crowds were gathering around him. By the end of Chapter 7 they were killing him. He became the first Christian martyr. Beginning in Acts 6:8 we see how Stephen, that man who lived inside out, handled it.

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedman (as it was called) - Jews of

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Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

"So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen's articulate defense and proclamation of the gospel is given in Acts 7, and the epilogue is told beginning in verse 54:

When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen was an inside-out man. He was not controlled by external circumstances. He did not become arrogant or proud when he performed signs and wonders and received the fame of gathering crowds. Nor did he become depressed and bitter when he was criticized and condemned by those who turned against him.

Which are you? Are you living life outside in or inside out? Which would you like to be? Maybe you've

tried to get your inner life put together the way it should be, but you have failed. You need help.

What you need is Jesus Christ! When you come to him in faith, he moves into your life and turns you inside out!

Computers have two primary components: hardware and software. "Hardware" is what's on the outside - - - the metal and plastic, the nameplate and model number, the color and size and age. "Software" is what's on the inside. It's the program that determines what the computer does, what it takes in and turns out, what makes the hardware work. When you change the software the outside appearance isn't altered at all, but there is a world of difference on the inside! And the difference on the inside determines what that computer can do.

Becoming a Christian is a change in software. You don't change much on the outside. You stay the same age, same color, same shape. But, oh, the differences on the inside! The old software of sin is taken out and the new software of Jesus Christ is put in. That is the beginning of really living right from the inside out.

If that's the change you need, you can make it right now. Pray and tell God you want to become a Christian. Ask God to throw out all your old software of sin and reprogram you with Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Live inside out!

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