



Do You Really Know Yourself?

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Scripture: John 1:12

THE topic for this talk is somewhat difficult. It has many complexities and ramifications, and we are not just sure what we can make of it. But we can try. The question we raise is this: Do You Really Know Yourself? And this question is directed to the speaker as well. Do I really know myself? In the years you have lived up to now, have you ever really got acquainted with yourself?

It could just be that a great deal of the confusion and tumult in this country today springs from people's restless desire to know themselves. Especially is this true among certain groups of young people. They seem to be wrought up and crudely antagonistic and hostile toward everything. They rationalize that their actions are an effort to do something about the Establishment, whatever that is. They are discontented with it. They don't like it. They want to

change it. They actually want to take it over. Or do they? Oftentimes actions directed outward and having social implications are merely reflections of an inner disturbance - of people trying to find themselves.

Certainly it is a pathetic thing to live all your life and finally die without ever having truly known yourself. The philosopher Schopenhauer trumped into a man on the street one day. The man angrily asked, "Who do you think you are, anyway?"

Schopenhauer, ever the philosopher, finding material for speculation in everything, walked on down the street saying to himself, "I wonder. I wonder who I am. I never knew. Will I ever know?"

Well, it does seem that this topic is germane to the turmoil of our time. Just the other day - down South this was - I met a young lady who was obviously not a native of the United States, as she had a French accent. She explained that she was French Canadian. I asked her what she was doing in the South and she answered, "I am trying to find myself."

"You had to come all the way from Canada down here to find yourself?" I asked. "What is your religion?"

"Catholic," she replied. "But I never found myself in it - so I have joined up with a camp here where they are studying the mysticism of the East, its relaxation and quietness. Here I hope to find myself."

Well, I said, "I am sure that you could find yourself thousands of people around the world receive each month their own wonderful religion, as many others have." She was restless. You could see it in her face printed copies of Dr. Peale's sermons. We will also gladly mail them to you, your family and friends. Simply send names and addresses (with Zip no.) to: Foundation for Christian Living, Pawling, NY 12564. Her whole demeanor. She was reaching for something she hadn't found. And she was mixed up. This Christian work is entirely dependent upon voluntary contributions - she was well acquainted with herself. as no specific charge or subscription price is made for these printed sermons. Your gifts, together with others, make possible the world-wide distribution of Dr. Peale's message of practical Christian living.

THAT very same day toward evening I boarded an airplane leaving Miami and a man with a briefcase came and took the seat beside me. I didn't know him - don't know his name now. He didn't know me, and doesn't know my name now. But we had an interesting little conversation. He looked like a good average American Citizen, around 65 years of age, maybe. It was raining hard as we took off. He took some routine-looking business reports out of his briefcase and started working on them.

The plane gained altitude and finally came out on top of the overcast. There, extending in all directions, was the glorious scene you often see at 30,000 feet when the rays of the setting sun cause the expanses of great billowing clouds below to gleam in kaleidoscopic splendor. I was in the window seat. He leaned toward me, to see better, and said, "My, isn't that beautiful! Sure is a wonderful world God has made."

"It sure is," I agreed.
He was silent for a few moments, taking it all in. Then he said, "You know, I am getting up to where I will have to retire soon. Guess I'll be living down here in Florida somewhere. But I don't want to retire."

"Why do you do it then?" I asked.
"They have a rule about it in my company," he replied.
"I made the rule myself, so I'll have to live by it." He looked at me and asked, "When are you going to retire?"

"I don't know," I said. "I haven't thought about it."
"Well, I don't want to retire," he repeated. "You know why? Because I don't really know myself yet. I wonder if I ever will. I'd like to really find myself before having to quit."

"I happen to believe that religion is how a person finds

himself," I said to him. "Through Christ is where I find myself is a great thing- a very great thing. It seemed curious that he had talked about himself so openly. Something in the mood of the hour maybe; some need to talk. Before long we were at Atlanta, where we both got off. He shook me by the hand. Very intently he said, "I got a lot out of our conversation."

Well, so did I, because it gave me an opportunity to witness to something I truly believe: that no human being ever finds himself in the highest sense until he finds himself spiritually. Essentially, we are spiritual beings. You have a physical body and when I am looking at you that is what I see. I don't see the real you at all. Similarly, you look at me and you see a physical body; you don't see me. We are invisible one to the other because we are spirit. And unless you find and know yourself in the spirit you never truly know yourself.

Now the Bible tells us that to those who receive Him Christ gives the power to become the sons of God, which means to have godlike qualities of serenity, love, compassion, goodness, strength. But of course there is a lot of evil in us. And to know yourself spiritually you have to face and know the evil that is in you. This is a phase of self-discovery that everybody ought to enter into. There is a great deal of evil in the human heart, a great deal of wickedness, and it gets down into the unconscious and motivates much of our lives. We are sometimes directed almost entirely by it. And if one wants to really know himself and get freed from his limitations he has to uncover this evil that is in him.

Today you can go into thousands of churches and not

hear anything said about evil. Or they will talk about the evil in Washington, the evil in Albany, the evil in Harlem and the evil on Park Avenue - all general things. But this evil that is in Washington and in Harlem and on Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue and everywhere else isn't just out there on the street. You can walk every street in town and not see one speck of evil. You won't find it lying on the street or in the gutter or in any such place. Where the evil? In human hearts! That's where it is. In people. Today this is glossed over. And people don't know themselves.

ONE of the most curious experiences we ever had in the counseling work of the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry was the case of a man who never got drunk, never involved himself in a dirty deal, never had an affair with anybody else's wife, was a man of rectitude and honor, but was *mean*. Before this man came to us for counseling his wife had a talk with me. She was a gentle little woman. She said that she had lived with her husband for, I think, thirty years or more. "I want to talk with you about him," she said. "I have never understood my husband."

"It is time you got acquainted with him, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, I would like to know what it is all about," she replied.

"What does he do?"

"He is a good man," she answered.

"Did he ever get drunk and beat you up?" I asked.

"Oh, no, he never gets drunk."

"Is he crooked?"

"Oh, no, he is the soul of honesty."

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"Well," I asked, "does he gamble? Waste his money?"

"No, he doesn't do any of that."

"Does he run around with other women?"

"Oh, no," she said, "he is the soul of honor."

When I had pursued this questioning through every ordinary kind of weakness I could think of, I asked, "What is wrong with him?"

"He is the meanest man who ever lived." And she went on to say, "He really could be a great man if he wasn't mean. He pushes me around and yells at me and I am scared to death of him all the time."

So I gave her a little advice. "I think the trouble with you is that you are too sweet. You are softly sweet. I think your wife should be sweet, but she shouldn't be softly sweet. She should be strongly sweet." I wasn't too sure how she would be able to benefit from this distinction but I continued, "You musn't let him push you around."

She told me that certain people in his office had confided in her that at the slightest irritation he would hit the ceiling. I gathered from all she said that he was floating around the ceiling most of the time, both at work and at home.

"You love your husband, don't you?" I asked.

"Yes," was her sincere answer.

"Why don't you stand up to him sometime? Let's see if we can heal him."

Things went on the same way for some time. Then finally one night the worm turned. He was yelling and carrying on and throwing things. He threatened to take the telephone directory and throw it against the wall so hard it would break in two. Suddenly she said to him, "I have listened to you long enough! You sit down in that chair!" Where upon he sat! She said, "Don't say a word! I want to talk

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to you." And she proceeded to tell him what she thought of his mean and unpleasant traits, but because of her found admiration for him she also talked to him about a really great man he could be.

Well, he told me later that while his wife was at him suddenly she faded and he saw what seemed to be a slowly moving river - one of the most extraordinary inner visions I ever heard described. It was a slowly moving, ponderous river, and he became aware that this was his own personality flowing before him. He was getting a deep inner vision of himself. And in the river was a dark, ugly, heavy thing bobbing slowly up and down. He realized that this ugly thing floating in the river was sinfulfulness - a composite of it in one object. He saw it was hard and would be difficult to break up, but he knew that it had to be broken up.

Then the river faded - and there was his wife. She had now stopped talking. She was looking at him in wonderment. He told her what he had seen. She burst into tears. "Why!" she said, "what a wonderful man you can be!"

THE very next day he came to us for counseling. And he saw the late Dr. Smiley Blanton, a man of great insight. Dr. Blanton said to him, "We must break up that floating thing and break it up fast. If we don't, your personality will harden over it and you may never see the river again."

What happened? Through counseling they broke it up. It was dissolved. Occasionally I encounter the wife. She always says the same thing to me in about the same words: "I wouldn't have believed what a wonderful person my husband is." And the man himself says, "I got to know myself."

It may not be very pleasant getting to know yourself

But self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom, as the Greek philosophers said long ago. Self-knowledge is the beginning of the development of a better personality. So you and I had better get acquainted with the evil that may be in us. We had better get to know ourselves as we are. But finding and eliminating evil things isn't the whole story. Not at all. There is also excitement and joy in self-discovery, for while we may have evil in us we also have latent greatness in us. Whoever you are, you are potentially a great human being. There are cynical religious leaders who say you shouldn't tell people that they are great. Why not? Who made them? God made them, didn't He? Does God make anything bad? He made you and He made you right! He made you good! He made you great! The pity of it is that some people live all their lives without ever releasing the real greatness that is within them. They settle for a self image that is limited. We limit ourselves. We reach a certain plateau and then we tell our selves that that is as much as we can do with ourselves. We settle for it, we camp down there and we remain there the rest of our lives - except that actually we don't; actually we retrogress, for unless you go forward you go backward; you don't stand still, ever. So get acquainted with the greatness that is within you. You have far more untapped power than you have ever realized.

THERE is a story about a woman whose house was destroyed by a tornado that struck Indiana about a year ago. She has seen these tornadoes. All of a sudden out of a clear sky they come. There is a roar like the sound of 10,000 freight trains, as somebody described it. The sky grows dark. There is the whistling of high wind. And on comes a blast of such elemental force as you can hardly imagine.

Well, this tornado cut a swath through this Indiana town and destroyed, I think, some 1,500 houses in two minutes of time. From God, "trailing clouds of glory" from God who is with us, we have something of God in us and therefore we have limitless power.

Now, before it struck, this woman was lying in bed because she was paralyzed from the waist down. Her husband was away at work. Their two babies were in the next room. Whoever was supposed to be taking care of the babies was not there at the time. The woman was alone in the house with the babies. The radio was on. It was warning everybody to flee to the cellars. This woman couldn't flee. She felt her helpless limbs and she started to pray. As she prayed there awakes something deep within her where latent power is, the dormant unused power that is in every human being, seldom, if ever, called upon.

A maternal urge to save those babies proved stronger than a presumed paralysis. It was the power of the mind over the body. She pulled herself to the edge of the bed. She threw her legs out. She put her feet on the floor. With Herculean effort she stood on her feet. She started to walk. She went into the next room. She put a baby under either arm. She went down into the cellar and closed the door - one minute before the house was swept from its foundations. She had saved herself and the babies. From that time on she was no longer bedridden.

There are thousands of such incidents of the activation of the illimitable power in an individual under the challenge of a supreme crisis. And the message of Christianity is that you don't have to wait for a tornado to bring your greatness out of you. You can have a spiritual crisis which you reach for God through Jesus Christ and which drags your latent greatness into action so you live with power. Your mind is limitless. The average person never uses the full power of his mind or of his soul. Because

the power of God in Christ we can live unlimited lives. It tries to help us the sons of God. It tries to help this world to relinquish its self-image of defeat and hate and war and conflict and develop a true image of what by the grace of God it can become — through more of us individually becoming great people. So let Jesus Christ introduce you to yourself and let you know who you really are.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for this concept that a child of God is a recipient of God's own Self and that there is no limit to Thy goodness or Thy strength. So touch the life of each of us today. Help us to get truly acquainted with our great selves. Through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.

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