

What About Me?

A sermon by Christian St John

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About a year ago I was talking to a friend and he asked me something I had never been asked before; he asked me, "Are you part of the me generation?"

Am I part of the "me" generation? I have thought about his question a lot since our conversation and have even done some research. It turns out that there is a new label for anyone born in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s; scholars now refer to this generation as Generation Me.

This means that in 2008 people between the ages of 8 and 38 are part of Generation Me, the age group that is described as the generation who take it for granted that the self comes first.

I'm a member of this generation myself, born in 1971.

Jean Twenge, an author on the subject, says in his book ***Generation Me***, "*these people have never known a world that put duty before self, and unlike the old belief that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one, they believe that needs of the individual should come first.*"

We live in a time when high self-esteem is encouraged from childhood, when young people have more freedom and independence than ever. We are told to reach for the stars. We are encouraged to be all we can be, to take whatever we want, even if sometimes it costs us relationships with family and friends.

We live in a generation that doesn't want to work hard and yet cries out I deserve so much more. We live in uncertain times, financially speaking, and yet we spend more on me than ever before. We spend less time focused on things like God and faith and more time reading our daily horoscopes and planning for the future. We read the latest John Grisham novel with anticipation and expectation and yet we oftentimes find the Bible irrelevant and boring. According to recent stats... The average person living in North America spends 5 hours every day watching the TV and only 10-20 mins per day spending quality time with family and friends.

It's true; we are living in Generation Me. And the cry that can be heard all throughout our land is, "*What About Me?*"

Some say that this "me" fixation is not the same thing as being selfish, but what about the things we are taught... "Just be yourself, even if people don't like the real you," "you don't need to change unless you want to," "Believe in yourself," "You must love yourself more than anyone else," and my personal favourite, "if something makes you happy then do it."

But is it fair to say that ours is the only generation that has lived this way, that ours is the generation with a "me" fixation?

I don't think so. Maybe the "me" mentality has never before been more prevalent than now, but I would argue that the "me" mentality has been with us for a very long time.

Turn with me to Genesis 3: 1

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' " 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Right then and there the serpent planted a seed in Eve's mind, the seed of, "What about me?"

6 The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom,

I'm no gardener, but I'm astounded at how quickly the "me" seed grew. And a question began forming in Eve's mind, a question she had never asked before, and yet this question has plagued mankind ever since... Here she was in paradise. Everything that Adam and Eve could possibly ever want was right there. And yet Eve looked at the fruit, and even though she and Adam had been told not to eat it, she asked herself "What about me?"

(6) ...so she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Right then and there in the garden of Eden Adam and Eve succumbed to the question that has probably been asked more times than any other question, "What about me?" And down through the ages this question has played a part in the downfall of many great men and women.

And every generation since then has been a victim of the "me, myself, and I" disease we often refer to as sin. After all what is sin? Sin is a deliberate act of disobedience that goes against the expressed will of God to the benefit, or detriment, of the individual that committed the sin. In other words sin has never been a "we" thing, it's always been a "me" thing, as everyone has their own free will.

So the question remains... "What about me?"

The Bible is filled with "me" minded people. The great and mighty **Samson** might have fared a little better if it wasn't for Delilah and his "What About Me?" attitude.

King Saul in a great act of "me-ness" did something strictly forbidden by God, he summoned the Prophet Samuel from the dead to hear something nice... "I am in great distress," Saul said. *"The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do."*

"What about me Samuel, what about me?"

Three times in the Gospel accounts we are introduced to three people who think they want to follow Jesus and yet they haven't gotten past the whole "me" thing.

One said I will follow you but first I want to go and bury my father... possibly because he had something to gain by his father's death, maybe an inheritance.

Another said I will follow you but let me go and say goodbye to my family... maybe he was a little unsure as to whether he really wanted to follow Jesus or stay at home in his comfort zone.

And then there's the rich young ruler. "I will follow you Jesus" he declares. "Ok," Jesus says, "Good to have you on board. But first go and sell everything you have and give all the money away, then come and follow me." We're told that the rich young ruler went away sad and I have a feeling he was thinking, "What about me?"

And let's not forget the nation of Israel and their "you/me" struggle. For forty years they would pray "what about you, Lord" and were people who were dedicated to God in everything that they did, and then they would begin asking "What about us? What about me?" And then things would start to fall apart around them.

This morning I want us to look at 2 of my favourite "me" people in the Bible. And I hope that by looking at these two men we will see that being a "me" person just doesn't work if you want to follow God.

The first person I want to look at is Jonah. Now Jonah is a prophet of God who unfortunately had a weakness for "me-ness."

According to the book of Jonah, God orders Jonah to prophesy against the city and people of Nineveh. Not wanting to, Jonah tries to avoid God's command by going to Joppa and sails to Tarshish. A huge storm arises and the sailors, realizing this is no ordinary storm, cast lots and learn that Jonah is to blame. In maybe the only selfless act Jonah does freely, he admits that the storm is because of him and states that if he is thrown overboard the storm will cease. The sailors try to get the ship to the shore, but failing this decide that their only option is to throw Jonah overboard, at which point the sea calms. Jonah is miraculously saved by being swallowed by a large fish. In chapter two, while in the great fish, Jonah prays to God and this is where I want to pick up the story.

Jonah 2

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. 2 He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.

3 You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.

4 I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

5 The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God.

7 "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD."

10 And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

This is a lovely prayer of thanksgiving. However, given the context of the story it seems completely out of place.

As such many scholars believe that this prayer reveals the depth of Jonah's "Me-ness." For example: The words me, my, and I are spoken 24 times and not once does he mention the people of Nineveh by name. He talks about being back at the temple and offering sacrifices, he even talks about God's grace, and yet doesn't say "I will do what you have asked of me. I will go to the people of Nineveh and proclaim what you have asked me to."

In fact Jonah has to be told a second time to go to Nineveh, and not surprisingly he obeys this time. But his "me-ness" doesn't stay hidden for too long.

He goes to Nineveh and proclaims: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."

Nothing about salvation, nothing about turning to the Lord... "In forty days you will all perish."

And yet something amazing happens. The people of Nineveh from the lowest to the greatest turned to the Lord and he relented.

Anyone else would have been blown away and amazed by the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. Scripture reveals to us that the population of Nineveh was about 120,000 people. Anyone else would have marvelled at the Lord's saving grace. But not Jonah. We're not really sure why, maybe it's just plain old racial hatred, but after seeing the people of Nineveh turn to the Lord he again prays to the Lord and in a complete fit of "me" he cries out in Chapter 4, "Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah, it seems, never learned anything throughout this entire story. The Lord told him to go to Nineveh and he said "What about me and what I want?" Then In the belly of the whale he cries out "What about me? I want to see the temple again and have my old life back." Then when all is said and done he sees the salvation of the Lord and he cries out "What about me and my feelings... I would rather die than see this."

Jonah comes in at number 2 on my "What about me" scale of biblical characters.

Number 1 though has to go to one of my personal heroes, King David.

Now King David wasn't always a "me" person, but he definitely had his moments.

In fact David was not just the King of Israel but also the King of the "What about me" question.

2 Samuel 11:2-5

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,

David begins to think “What about me?”

3 So David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

Again David thinks “What about me?” But this time he acts upon his “me-ness.”

4 David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. Then she went back home. 5 The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

Uh-oh, the King got Bathsheba pregnant. But instead of simply saying my bad, he begins to think of a solution. And his solution? Yep, you’ve guessed it, “What about me?”

David invites her husband Uriah back from a great battle, asks him how things are going and then gives him permission to go home for the evening.

However, the next day Uriah reveals that he didn’t go home and revel in the comforts of home, because the men under his command slept in fields away from the comforts of their homes.

So David invites him over for some food and drink. In fact the text tells us that David gets him drunk and then sends him on his merry way. ‘Ah-ha’ he thinks, problem solved. Uriah will go home now, sleep with his wife and then he’ll simply think the kid is his.

But again Uriah doesn’t go home. I think this story shows how much character Uriah had... and how little David had. Because David, still in his “what about me?” state does something that is downright evil. He writes a letter with full instructions on how he wants Uriah to die. And then, get this; he gives the letter to Uriah for him to deliver to his commanding officer.

And of course the letter is carried out to the T, and Uriah is killed in the thick of battle.

Ok problem solved. David and Bathsheba can just lie about the kid and say it was Uriah’s after all. But no David is still in his “what about me” mindset and so takes Bathsheba to be his wife.

Let’s turn over to 2 Samuel 12:1-6

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

4 "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Many times in the story David had asked the question, "What about me?" When he saw Bathsheba for the first time - "What about me?"

When he had Bathsheba brought to him - "What about me?"

When he slept with Bathsheba - "What about me?"

When he found out that she was pregnant with his child - "What about me?"

When Uriah didn't fall for his wily plan - "What about me?"

When he wrote the death letter for Uriah - "What about me?"

When he took Bathsheba to be his wife - "What about me?"

All through the story David had asked "What about me?"

And now God turns it completely around and in one instant ends David's "What about me" lifestyle by asking, "Ok David, what about you? You are the man I am speaking about."

At that point in time I bet David felt as though he was this small. Like a naughty child caught with his hand in the cookie jar, David was in serious trouble and he knew it.

There's a scene in Monty Pythons Meaning of Life when a fat man eats everything on the menu and is tempted to eat just one "tiny thin wafer." He does and he explodes.

Bathsheba was David's little thin wafer. As King he had everything. Servants, concubines, soldiers... he said go and they went, he said come and they came. But, instead of being thankful for all that God had blessed him with David wanted one more thing. And Boom his life exploded!

And nothing much has changed. People dig themselves into big holes by maxing out their credit cards, taking out loans, and re-mortgaging themselves to the hilt just to buy the latest and best, or to keep up with the Joneses, all the while saying, "What about me?"

Others live in resentment and bitterness because they have seen how others live and they ask "What about me?"

At one time or another I'm sure we've all asked "What about me?" The difference is if we stay there.

I want to finish this morning by looking at the example of another person who asked the question... "what about me?"

In Matt.26 Jesus knowing the time of his sacrifice was almost at hand goes to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He knows that in a few short hours he will be arrested, accused, beaten, humiliated, and eventually nailed to a cross. The text tells us he was in great anguish, so much so that his sweat became like blood.

And he prays... *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me..."*

In all the Gospel accounts this is the only time I can find when Jesus has a "what about me?" moment. "Father, what about me?"

But then he turns it right around and says, "If your plan cannot be completed any other way... then your will be done." Instead of What about Me Jesus says "No Father, what about you?"

I think this is a beautiful example of Jesus knowing what we go through, why we ask such questions. But notice, Jesus doesn't stay there and camp out, he moves right on through it.

The problem as I see it is we all too often get stuck in the "what about me?" thinking.

And It's hard sometimes not to think this way. I remember one time when I was preaching looking out at the ten or so people who had attended church that morning and thinking, "All that time spent writing the sermon... all the effort, and for what?" And I got so depressed thinking "I bet Billy Graham never stood there and spoke to 10 people."

We will all from time to time ask "What about me?"

Maybe you are now. Maybe you're looking at the nice car, big screen TV or the beautiful wife of a neighbour and asking "I want those, I deserve those, what about me?"

Maybe you long for the old days when you could drink and smoke and take drugs and you are thinking "Why can't I, What about me?"

Maybe you'll be tempted to lie on this year's tax return, "I worked hard for my money, what about me?"

Maybe Gods calling you to himself, and you're asking "What's in it for me. All this talk of serving... what about me?"

"What about me?" the question that has plagued mankind ever since the fall, a question that never satisfies, and always leaves us wanting more. We get so caught up with ourselves sometimes that we forget about the Lord.

Maybe we would all do well when faced with a Me moment, to follow Jesus example and instead of asking "what about me" and staying there, asking the Lord "what about you Father, what about your plans, what about your will, what about you?"