

John 8:12-59

I AM

## INTRODUCTION

The myth of Narcissus is a story from Greek mythology. It tells the tale of a handsome young man named Narcissus who was renowned for his beauty. He was so proud of his looks that he refused the advances of many suitors, male or female.

One day, while walking in the forest, Narcissus came across a pool of water. As he looked into the water, he saw his own reflection and fell in love with it. He gazed at his reflection for hours, unable to tear himself away, and eventually wasted away and died of thirst and starvation.

In some versions of the myth, Narcissus' reflection is so beautiful that he tries to embrace it and falls into the pool, drowning. In others, he realizes that he can never possess his own reflection and kills himself out of despair.

The story of Narcissus is often seen as a cautionary tale about the dangers of vanity, self-obsession, and the pursuit of physical beauty at the expense of all else. The term "narcissism" is derived from this myth and is used to describe excessive self-love or self-absorption.

## THE FALL OF SATAN

The chief narcissist, of course, is the Devil. Lucifer was so obsessed with himself and his glory, that this resulted in his rebellion against God and his subsequent fall from grace. Ezek. 28 depicts this, saying:

*"You were the seal of perfection,  
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.  
13 You were in Eden, the garden of God;*

*Every precious stone was your covering:  
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,  
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,  
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.  
The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes  
Was prepared for you on the day you were created.*

*“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;  
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;  
I cast you to the ground,  
I laid you before kings,  
That they might gaze at you.*

Isaiah 14 further illustrates the Fall of Satan in this way:

<sup>12</sup> *“How you are fallen from heaven,  
O Day Star, son of Dawn!*

*How you are cut down to the ground,  
you who laid the nations low!*

<sup>13</sup> *You said in your heart,*

*‘I will ascend to heaven;*

*above the stars of God*

*I will set my throne on high;*

*I will sit on the mount of assembly*

*in the far reaches of the north;*

<sup>14</sup> *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;*

*I will make myself like the Most High.’*

<sup>15</sup> *But you are brought down to Sheol,*

*to the far reaches of the pit.*

The heart cry of the Devil and all who are his children has been, and always will be, I AM. Because he wants to be God, who alone is the great I AM. And in their self-absorption and self-worship, they wind up destroying themselves, and all others who get caught in the way of their pride and self-glorification.

In Dante's Inferno Dante is led by the Roman Poet Virgil down into the 9 circles of Hell. And as he descends, the levels of hell keep going deeper, and become smaller, until they get to center of hell, where the Devil is. Don't miss the moral geography here. The Devil is at the center of Hell, because he is the most self-centered being ever. And there he is, half frozen in a block of ice, eternally devouring the bodies of the arch traitors of history, Judas, and Brutus and Cassius.

Our modern age is infatuated with itself. The new age spirituality that I often warn about is built upon self-worship. And the chief "virtues" of our age - homosexuality and transgenderism - are praised and promoted for all the same reasons the devil fell from the grace of God - self worship.

Our whole modern world has been sold the lie that the greatest thing one could do to obtain real lasting happiness and a meaningful life, is to seek your own happiness and personal fulfillment and meaning; To be obsessed with your own feelings, your own thoughts, your own self-image, your own truth, your own glory.

But over and over again, people find that they make for a pretty lame god, and they are never satisfied with what they find in themselves. And more often than not, like Narcissus and Judas, they commit suicide.

## THE SELF IS NOTHING - DEMONS, YO!

In that sense we can understand our modern age as Centripetal. The term "centripetal" refers to something that is moving inwards towards a central point. And our Narcissistic age is centripetal, since it is always preoccupied with the self and its image as the central fact of its existence. But Christopher Lasch, in his book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, describes this pre-occupation with the self is not self-love in any traditional sense. In fact, it actually breaks apart society and the person. The Narcissism is rather "a desperate and increasingly unrewarding search for "something else" which in reality is **nothing**; a search for a mythical unity and a sense of belongingness in a fragmented world, a search for the self which has become a victim of its own power."

It is interesting that Lasch notes that this something else which people are looking for in their self-obsession is **nothing**, because nothing is actually the word for idol, in Hebrew. Which is why Paul says in 1 Cor. 8:4 "we know that an idol is nothing. And that there are no gods but One." He also indicates however that reality behind idols are demons!

Thus the people of our nation are lost, enslaved to the worship of self. Searching for meaning and purpose and happiness and a sense of belonging in themselves, they come up with nothing, and consequently become possessed by demons.

Is it any wonder that as our people becomes less Christian and more obsessed with self, that there are more mental health problems and more therapists? Men cannot get out of their own heads, they cannot stop thinking about themselves, and they

cannot imagine their lives without themselves at the center of their story. And they think that if they just keep trying to seek their own glory, and happiness and sense of self-worth and fulfillment, they will find it. But in the end, they find nothing, but the demonic.

Precisely because of that demonic influence on our culture, that things are turning to madness and hell - for themselves, and for others. We say we live in clown world. Because demon love the chaos and insanity of rebelling against God and His love.

The most demonic people are those who care ultimately about nothing but themselves and cannot stop thinking about themselves, and how they are at the center of their universe. Thus G.K Chesterton notes that most of the men in lunatic asylums are those who believe the most in themselves. And that curing a madman is of his self-obsession is not merely arguing with a philosopher, it is casting out a demon, he says.

Is it any wonder why the Lord Jesus Christ condemned the people of his day, as he condemns us today, as being children of their father the devil, who is from below? We are a self-obsessed people, just as the Devil is, who now lives below, in his own self-centered prison.

Thus Jesus says to the people in John 8:23-24, “*You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you, that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.*”

Jesus Christ told his generation, as he tells us today, if you put yourself at the center of all things, then you are of your father who is from below, and you will die in your sins. For that is the

essence of being hellish and demonic and of the devil. Putting oneself at the center of all things is worthless – for it is a search for nothing, but demons.

## LIAR, LUNATIC, OR LORD

Now the Pharisees were wise enough to actually know that much – for this is the very reason they then accused Christ of having a demon, because he kept testifying about himself and saying things like, *“I am the One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.”* And *“I told you that unless you believe that I AM you will die in your sins. And I came from God. And whoever listens to my word has eternal life.”*

And here is where C.S. Lewis' maxim comes into play. Jesus is either Liar, a Lunatic, or He is Lord. The Pharisees went with the first two options, calling him a liar, saying that because he was bearing witness about himself his testimony was not true. And then they went to the next one accused Christ of being a lunatic, that is, having a demon.

They say, *“Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”*

But Christ says, *“I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Truly, truly I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”* The Jews said to him, *“Now we know that you have a demon!”*

And this is very important. Jesus identifies himself as God when he says in 8:24, Unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins. And he does it again in v. 28 – When Jesus said to them,

*“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM.”* And he does it again at the end of John 8 when Jesus says, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” And for that they picked up stones to throw at him, because in their eyes he was blaspheming.

But this is not self-aggrandizement. This is not self-glorification. For Jesus makes it clear that he does nothing on his own authority, but speaks only what the Father has taught him. And it is God who sent Jesus. And the Father is the one who also testifies of Jesus’ words. And God is always with Jesus. And Jesus always does the things that are pleasing to him. And he says in v. 54 – *If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is the Father who glorifies me.”*

He likewise says in John 5 “*I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”*

And this is the issue. Jesus Christ is the faithful witness concerning God. And God the Father and the Holy Spirit are the faithful witnesses concerning Jesus. God the Father has placed his approval on His Son in the form of the Spirit resting upon him at His baptism, but then ultimately raising him from the dead.

Christ would be liar if he acted like God did not give him that approval. So, since he is the One who is to come, since he is the prophet like Moses, whom God said you must listen to him, Jesus has to exalt his word and tell people how it is. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, nobody gets to the Father except through

Him. He alone has the words of eternal life. He alone forgives sins. Unless you believe that he is I AM, you will die in your sins.

The simple fact is, that there is only one who is truly at the center of all things, and that is Jesus Christ, and the Father confirms that to the whole world when Christ was crucified and rose from the dead. This is the way Christ brought glory to His Father, and the way the Father brought glory to His Son.

As the Lord says in John 12 - *“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour – Father, glorify your name. Then a voice spoke from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”*

In fact, it is precisely because Jesus was so intent on glorifying His Father, that the Father then glorified His Son. But if Christ were to seek his own glory, then the people's words would have been correct. He would have a demon, and he would be like the people of his generation, and our own, who do not receive the One who has come in His Father's Name, but who eagerly embrace and celebrate and rejoice and idolize everyone else who comes in their own name.

## THE CHIEF END

But Jesus Christ personifies the heart of the Psalmist who says in Ps. 115:1 -

**Not to us, O LORD, not us, but to your name give glory!**

This is also why keeping the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism in your heart is so important.

**What is the chief end of man? A: To glorify God and to enjoy him forever.**

John Piper so richly understood that the **chief end of God is likewise to glorify God and to enjoy him forever**. For God glorifies himself, not by being self-centered and narcissistic like us, but by bestowing glory upon the other persons of the Trinity.

Thus you could say, The chief end of the Father is to glorify the Son. And the chief end of the Son is to glorify the Father. And the chief end of the Spirit is to glorify the Father and the Son. But the Father does not seek his own glory, and the Son doesn't seek his own glory. And neither does the Spirit seek his own glory. Neither one seeks his own glory, each member of the Trinity exists to give glory to the other. Therefore the Great I AM, is actually the Great YOU ARE - Eternally bestowing glory and honor and praise on the other Persons of the God head.

It is to this end that mankind has been created and redeemed, so that we might not be infatuated with ourselves and seek our own glory, honor, and immortality. But rather, we seek to glorify and honor Jesus Christ. And when we do that, we are living for the purpose for which we have been created and redeemed.

And the chief place where God has displayed His glory to be seen by all people is in the cross of Jesus Christ. Thus he says in John 8:28 - *“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.”*

## WHOM THE SON SETS FREE

Therefore Jesus says, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*”

And at that word of being set free, the people scoffed at Jesus saying,

‘*We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will become free?’*’

Which is quite an amazing assertion, isn’t it? Haven’t the Jews been enslaved and occupied and controlled over and over? First by the Egyptians, then at times by the Philistines, and then by the Assyrians, and then by the Babylonians, and then by the Persians, and then by Rome. Their whole existence has been pretty much one of being enslaved.

But the reason they most likely said they had never been enslaved to anyone, is because they thought that though they were enslaved in body, their spirits were still free. But we know that isn’t true either, for the history of Israel’s physical slavery has always been a result of their spiritual slavery to sin.

*Jesus therefore answered them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the Son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.’*

And this is something that we desperately need to understand today in America, where the American creed is Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness. We are shackled to the slavery of selfishness and narcissism disguised under the banner of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.

But the generation of Christ's day are so blind to their own chains which have enslaved them to their sins, that they even have the audacity to deny that they were ever slaves at all. And we today likewise insist that we are freer now than ever, all the while being totally in bondage to our sins and self-worship, and being given over to the demonic.

But, as one of my friends recently said:

*"When one is born again and comes to the understanding that the entire purpose of their existence on planet earth is to glorify and magnify Christ, they are set free from the horrendous burden of self-glorification and absorption. Every morning when a man wakes up, his immediate battle is the one whereby he will seek the "God entranced vision of all things", or the "self-absorbed determination of all things". One is freedom, joy and thanksgiving. The other is misery, dissatisfaction and grumbling.*

*When the child of God thinks about living as though Christ is the fixation of all and in all, it is delightful. He knows that the mechanism of his soul was created to extol, glorify and praise another. His world revolves properly around the Creator. When a carnal man thinks about God in such a way, he perceives it as burdensome. He has not yet seen the glory of God, nor tasted the freedom of a life redeemed and put properly in its order. His world revolves around himself."*<sup>1</sup>

## CENTRIFUGAL

But the true center of the universe is not the self but the cross of Christ. The cross is not centripetal – being self-focused. Rather the cross is **centrifugal** – which means things move away and

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Fiala -  
[https://www.facebook.com/jon.fiala.9/posts/pfbid02jF2n7Xc9L5x9P4S696PNbmUczJMcCr3nWegbEyHRPU87UsUh4fbDRV1z6US1iB4WI?comment\\_id=982978339752640&notif\\_id=1679508787526594&notif\\_t=feedback\\_reaction\\_generic&ref=notif](https://www.facebook.com/jon.fiala.9/posts/pfbid02jF2n7Xc9L5x9P4S696PNbmUczJMcCr3nWegbEyHRPU87UsUh4fbDRV1z6US1iB4WI?comment_id=982978339752640&notif_id=1679508787526594&notif_t=feedback_reaction_generic&ref=notif)

spread out from the center. The Cross of Christ is the symbol and the power of the love for others. God's love for us, and our love for others. It stretches forth its four arms to connect heaven and earth and to embrace the whole world under its saving wings.

Only when we are God centered, only when we are Christ centered are we truly centered beings, because we then possess the centrifugal force of the cross, to look away from ourselves, to the only one who can save. And then we look out to the lost world, and we desire to bring to it the message of redemption.

His love and compassion and mercy and glory and justice and righteousness flow out into the whole world from the cross, teaching others that the greatest commandment, is to love God and to love others. And this is godly. This is eternal life. And this is the freedom that the Son has purchased for us.

And it can only be experienced when we say with Paul in Galatians 6 – *Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

## CONCLUSION

We must reject the culture of Narcissism that surrounds us, and see that there is nothing there for us besides deceptive despair of death and the demonic. Our only hope to save ourselves from this evil influence is to look away from ourselves, to the only one in whom is eternal life, the Lord Jesus Christ, who can rightly say, “*Unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.*” Amen.

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## THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL

But there are a number of ways in which modern American culture are enslaving people to the god of self.

**Social media:** Social media has created a culture where people are encouraged to present a highly curated version of themselves to the world. This can lead to a focus on self-promotion, image management, and seeking validation from others. Social media can also foster a sense of entitlement, as people expect others to engage with and respond to their content.

The Christian response to social media, is **True Community**. For The Lord Jesus established His Church, in which he makes us to live before others in an honest way, warts and sins and all. It forces us to say sorry, and to forgive others. It forces us to pursue peace, and to seek the good of others, in order to maintain the greater good of the whole church, and it makes us have more patience. This stands in contrast to the isolation and self-absorption that can accompany the narcissism that is rampant on facebook.

**Celebrity culture:** American culture has long had an obsession with celebrity, which can be seen as a form of narcissism and self worship. Celebrities are often seen as larger than life and are idolized by many, leading to a culture where fame and attention are highly valued. And today it seems that you are a nobody if you don't have your own blog, youtube channel, facebook following, twitter handle, or podcast. Everyone wants to get their five minutes of fame.

But in contrast to Celebrity Culture, Jesus emphasizes the importance of **humility and meekness of heart**, recognizing that the only thing worth promoting and boasting in is not oneself, but Jesus Christ. This stands in contrast to a culture that encourages self-promotion and individualism. As Paul says in Galatians 6 – *Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

**Materialism:** American culture places a high value on material possessions and wealth, which can be seen as a manifestation of narcissism. People are encouraged to accumulate as much as they can and display their wealth to others as a way of demonstrating their value and success. Along with that is the culture of consumerism, in which people find their self-worth and good feelings in purchasing things.

In contrast to Materialism and Consumerism, Christ teaches that we should have **Compassion** for others and seek to alleviate their suffering. Jesus says, give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. He like wise says,

*do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* This focus on pursuing heavenly treasures and tending to the needs of others can help counteract the tendency towards self-absorption that characterizes narcissistic spirit of the age.

Our world tries to enslave us by promoting **Individualism**: American culture is often described as highly individualistic, which can be seen as a manifestation of narcissism. People are encouraged to focus on themselves and their own goals, their own happiness, their own sense of fulfillment, often at the expense of others. This can lead to a lack of compassion and a sense of entitlement. And more often than not, leads people to greater depression and sadness, and it does not fulfill its intended desires.

On the contrary, Jesus Christ teaches that we should love and **serve others**, even our enemies. He teaches that we are to put the needs of others before our own. This focus on the well-being of others is an antidote to the self-centeredness that characterizes narcissism. We have been freed to serve others.

And the last cultural problem we have that enslaves us to our sin and ourselves, is **Political polarization**: American culture has become increasingly polarized in recent years, with people often identifying strongly with one political party or ideology or race. This can lead to a sense of moral superiority and a belief that one's own views are always correct, and it causes us to demonize others. This can be seen as a form of narcissism.

And that number one thing that combats political polarization is **Transcendence**: Jesus Christ is the exalted King of kings, and Lord of lords, and His gospel is more true, and has more followers than any ideology. His word is eternal Heaven and Earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away. His message is not just for a particular people at a particular place and time. His Word points to a transcendent reality beyond the self and encourages us to orient our lives towards that reality – the kingdom of Heaven, the glory of God. This counter acts the modern preoccupation with the self that characterizes our cultural narcissism and enslaves us to our sins and our selves.