

Lazarus, the Rich Man, and Dr. Evil

Luke 16:14-31

#20 in series "Stories Jesus Told"

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Message

Clip 1 from *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*

[The scene opens on a view of a barren, mountainous region. The words, "1967 Somewhere outside Las Vegas appear on screen as Dr. evil speaks.]

Dr. Evil: *Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to my underground lair.*

[Dr. Evil is seated in a chair at a boardroom table with six other people seated around it. He is stroking a white long-haired cat as he speaks.]

Dr. Evil: *I have, here gathered before me, the world's deadliest assassins, and yet each of you has failed to kill Austin Powers.*

[The assassins around the table look uneasily at each other and then back at Dr. Evil]

Dr. Evil: *That makes me angry, and when Dr. Evil gets angry, Mr. Bigglesworth gets upset!*

Cat: *Meow.*

Dr. Evil: *And when Mr. Bigglesworth gets upset,*

[Dr. Evil's finger hovers over red buttons with names next to each one. He presses one button, with the name "Jurgen" next to it.]

Dr. Evil: *People die!*

[Jurgen's chair suddenly tilts back and he falls backwards into a tunnel behind him.]

Jurgen: *AHHHH!*

Dr. Evil: (laughing wickedly) *Ah ha ha ha ha ha!*

[Flames shoot up out of the tunnel and screams are heard from below. The other assassins look on confidently, secure because they are still sitting at the table. Then Dr. Evil's finger hovers over another red button labeled "Generalissimo." He laughingly presses the button the man, in a green uniform, who was seated next to Jurgen, falls backwards into another tunnel. Dr. Evil continues laughing wickedly as flames shoot up the second tunnel as Generalissimo screams.]

Generalissimo: *Whoah! Aahhhh!*

[A woman in a blue suit looks over her shoulder at the empty space and then back across the table with no expression, her fingers tapping on the table before her.]

Dr. Evil: (speaking over the screaming) *Why must I be surrounded by African idiots?!*

[Dr. Evil sits holding his cat and reaches for another button. He presses one, and a hook handed man gives a startled expression and starts to fall backwards as a woman next to him does the same. Both scream as they fall into their own tunnels and flames explode above the table. All the chairs that had slid backwards suddenly slide forward back into their original position smoking. A Fez capped man looks at the smoking chair next to him.)

Dr. Evil: *Mustafa . . .*

[Mustafa, wearing the red fez, looks startled, his head jerking and mouth moving open as he breathes unevenly, turning to look at Dr. Evil.]

Dr. Evil: *Frau Farbissina, . . .*

[Frau Farbissina silently eyes Dr. Evil and waits for him to speak.]

Dr. Evil: *I spared your lives (he continues slowly stroking the cat's head.) Because I need you to help me rid the world of Britain's top secret agent, . . .*

[Mustafa blots sweat off of his cheeks as Dr. evil continues to speak.]

Dr. Evil: *. . . the only man who can stop me now. We must kill Austin Powers!*

[The scene fades to black, then changes to show them all, along with others, back at the table again.]

Dr. Evil: *It's been 30 years, but I'm back. Everything's gone perfectly to plan except for one small flaw. Due to a technical error by my henchmen, Mustafa, complications arose in the un-freezing process.*

[Dr. Evil's fingers tap on the table before him. Mustafa looks at him.]

Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery clip 1 continued

Mustafa: *My design was perfect!*

Dr. Evil: *Look what you did to Mr. Bigglesworth!* [He holds up a hairless cat.]

Mr. Bigglesworth: *Meow.* (Looks balefully at Mustafa).

Mustafa: *But Dr. Evil, we were unable to anticipate feline complications to the reanimation process.*

Dr. Evil: *Silence!*

[His hand hovers over the button next to Mustapha's name and then he presses the button. Mustafa starts to jerk in his chair.]

Mustafa: *OOOoh!*

[His arms fly up and he flies backwards sliding down the tunnel behind him as flames shoot up afterwards.]

Mustapha: *Ahhhhh-hhh-ha!*

[Dr. Evil strokes Mr. Bigglesworth's head with his finger as he listens to the screams. The chair comes back up into position at the table throwing smoke up into the air as it does so.]

Dr. Evil: *Let this be a reminder to you all that this organization will not tolerate failure.*

Mustafa: *Ahh- ha-ha! Ohhh!*

[The scene shows a smoking grate with fire from below.]

Mustafa: *Ahh-ah ah!*

[The fires in the grate goes out suddenly.]

Dr. Evil: *Gentlemen, let's get down to business.*

Mustafa: *Oh!*

Dr. Evil: (pauses listening.)

Mustafa: *Ohh! Ah -ah ah-ahh- ha -ah!*

Dr. Evil: *We've got a lot of work to do.*

Mustafa: *Someone, help me! I - I'm still alive, only very . . . badly burned!*

Dr. Evil: *Some of you, I know, (waving around the table) some of you I'm meeting for the first time.*

Mustapha: (his voice coming up from below the smoking grate in the floor) *Ah-ha-ah, hello there! Anyone? Can someone call an ambulance? I'm in quite . . . A lot of pain!*

Dr. Evil: (stroking his cat) *Okay, you've all been gathered here to - . . .*

Mustafa: *Uhh-ooohh!*

Dr. Evil: (speaking over Mustafa's groaning) *form my evil cabinet (he puts his finger up and then reaches for the red phone on the table before him.) Excuse me. Heh.* (Whispering) *Yes, is John there?*

Man's voice: *Is he dead?*

Dr. Evil: *No, not dead. Burnt. Badly.*

Man's voice: *Would you like me to take care of it? Possibly to kill him?*

Dr. Evil: *Yes.*

Man's voice: *Kill him?*

Dr. Evil: *Righ-h-ht.* (He hangs up the red phone.)

Mustafa: *If somebody could open the retrieval hatch down here, I could get out! You see, I designed this device myself!* (You hear footsteps walking towards the voice and a creaking sound of a hat being opened)

Oh! (Another creaking sound,) *Hi! Good! I'm glad you finally listened. . .*

[Dr. Evil nods perfunctorily and keeps stroking his cat. He waves his hand and then purses his lips and listens carefully.]

Mustafa: *I'm very badly burned. Listen, so if you could just -*

[The sound of a gunshot is heard.]

Mustafa: *You shot me!*

Dr. Evil: *Okay, moving on.*

Mustafa: *You shot me right in the arm! Why did you—*

[There is another gunshot. Dr. Evil pauses for a minute, turning his head and listening. Crackling sounds come out of the grate along with wisps of smoke. A door creaks closed down below.]

Dr. Evil: *Right.*

I don't know exactly why, I just like that movie.

Luke 16:19-31 Jesus says,

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs, which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades (“hell” King James version), he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

(The picture is Lazarus and Abraham together at a big table.)

“Then he (the rich man) cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”

Now, we'll spend this week and next week on this story. But, before we can really get into it. . .

[Image of elephant in office building during a meeting]

I feel like I need to address the elephant in the room. Some people say it doesn't really matter, but I think it *does* matter. The elephant is a question, and the question is this: “Is God, Dr. Evil?”

[Prisoner caged with flames about to engulf him]

Maybe you've seen pictures like this. It's a prisoner being burned alive by ISIS militants, probably in Syria. They shout, “God is great!” when they do this.



This is a picture I took in Auschwitz. It's the remains of gas chambers and incinerators. The field was full of human ashes. Is God like Dr. Evil or Hitler?

[Image of people worshipping Molech]

This is an artist's rendition of the worship of Molech. In ancient times, some of the Jews sacrificed their infants to the pagan God, Molech, though Yahweh strictly forbade them to do so. They burned them with fire. Is God like Molech, Hitler, ISIS, and Dr. Evil or infinitely worse? For children offered to Molech, Aryan deities, or Allah (by ISIS) only burn for a minute or two.

Even Dr. Evil couldn't tolerate the sufferings of his henchmen Mustafa for more than a minute: "Someone help me! I'm still alive, although I'm very badly burned . . ." Even Dr. Evil could not enjoy his dinner while his enemies burned in pain. And yet, there are people that argue that this, in fact, is heaven. They say that heaven is a place where we sit at the table of the Lord and forever feast on his sumptuous banquet of grace, aware of the fact that most of humanity is tortured by God with a living death, - burned but not consumed, forever without end.

They even say that this makes the feast that much better, for we'll be a grateful for the good choice we made or grateful for the good luck to be chosen to choose grace. We'll be forever grateful that we are not them—those burning in flames—we are separate. "That's heaven," they say.

It's like sitting at the dinner table with Dr. Evil but the cries for help, from the flames below never come to an end. "That's heaven," they say. And whether you chose it, or are chosen to choose, whether you're an Arminian or a Calvinist, all agreed that to get there requires faith, and faith means trust. But if God is really Dr. Evil . . . well that's quite an elephant in the room, and in my heart. And I find God, rather difficult to trust.

In Luke 6, Jesus says, "*Love your enemies and do good. . . And you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. . . Be merciful even as your father is merciful.*"

Is endless torture merciful? Or, is God merciful *except* for endless torture? (That's quite an elephant in the room.) Is God love, except for the fact that He consigns most people to an endless, living death? Some say, "God is love and oh yeah, He's also the opposite of love. We call it justice." "And God is good, but, oh yeah, He's also Dr. Evil." "And, oh yeah, He's your Father." If someone convinced you that your father (who calls Himself love) was also "Dr. Evil," well, that might affect you in a rather negative sort of way. Actually, it's the very thing that keeps psychotherapists in business and the religion industry running at full steam.

Clip 2 from *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*

[The scene opens to show Frau Farbassina speaking to Dr. Evil in his office.]

Frau Farbassina: (with a German accent) *Remember when we froze your semen? You said, if it didn't look like you were coming back, we should try and make you a son so that a part of you could live forever?*

Dr. Evil: (nodding) *Oh sure.*

Frau Farbassina: *Well, after . . . A couple of years, we . . . got a little impatient. (Small laugh) Dr. Evil, I want you to meet your son.*

Dr. Evil: *My son?*

Frau Farbassina: *Ja. (Pauses with a smug smile. Then loudly . . .) Scott!*

[Dr. Evil jerks in his chair, startled by her scream. A door opens and Scott walks in wearing an orange jacket and blue pants. Dr. Evil turns in his chair and looks back at his son with eyebrow raised. He stands up.]

Dr. Evil: *Hello, Scott.*

Scott: *Hi.*

Dr. Evil: *I'm your father, Dr. Evil (His arms open wide).*

[The scene switches and moves to show people walking up the steps of a building with a sign in front saying, "Group Therapy Session in Progress." The therapist is guiding a father and son in conversation.]

Therapist: *Okay, give in to the beauty of your feelings, and say the words. Come on . . .*

Young man: *I love you dad. (He starts to cry)*

Dad: *I love you too son.*

[The father starts to cry with his son and reaches to hug him. They hug crying, and the rest of the group claps, commenting with phrases like "Way to go."]

Therapist: *Okay, group, we have some newcomers here today with us. Say hello to Scott and his father Mr. Ay-ville?*

Clip 2 continued from *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*

Dr. Evil: *Evil. Actually, . . . Dr. . . . Evil. (The corner of his mouth tilts up.)*

Group: *Hello Dr. Evil; hello Scott.*

Scott: *Hello everybody.*

Therapist: *So, Scott. Why don't we start with you. What brings you here with us today?*

Scott: *Well, I really just met my dad for the first time five days ago.*

Dr. Evil: *I was partially frozen his whole life.*

Therapist: *That is beautiful that you can admit to that!*

(The father and son nod and make agreeable noises.)

Therapist: *So, what - do you want to do, Scott?*

Scott: *I don't know, I was thinking like, I like animals. Maybe I'd be a vet.*

Dr. Evil: *An evil vet?*

Scott: *No! Maybe like, work in a petting zoo.*

Dr. Evil: *An evil petting zoo?*

Scott: *You always do that! (He points his finger at his father as he yells.)*

Dr. Evil: (hands out to his sides) *Wha-at? I-I? (looking at the people around him in puzzlement.)*

Scott: *I just think that he like, hates me. I really think he wants to kill me.*

Therapist: *Now Scott, we don't want to kill each other in here. We might say we do sometimes, but we, we really don't.*

Group: (all laugh together)

Dr. Evil: *Actually, the boy's quite astute. I really am trying to kill him but so far unsuccessfully. He's just quite wily like his old man.*

[The scene shifts back to his office. Dr. Evil gapes in astonishment, his mouth opening and closing. He eyes the buttons in front of them and his finger moves towards the one labeled Scott. Frau Farbassina slaps his hand away from the button. Dr. Evil hold his hand and pouts, lip out.]

Well as you know, Scott tries to please Dr. Evil, but he has a very hard time loving Dr. Evil. In the words of Isaiah, “*He honors his father with his lips but his heart is far from him*” (Isaiah 29:13) and eventually, Scott becomes the new Dr. Evil. Is that the point of the story? That we should care for the poor and suffering now so we can feast in heaven and ignore the poor and suffering (in hell) for all eternity? There’s an elephant in the room, an elephant in my heart, and an elephant in the story. Did Jesus tell the story to turn His followers into infinite and eternal compassion-less rich men who feast in heaven, while the rest of humanity burns in hell? There’s an elephant in the house of love. Maybe the elephant is lie from the devil, and Jesus wants to kill it with the revelation of the Truth. Or maybe the elephant is the Truth in the story begging us to take a second look at the lie.

Whatever the case, in my experience whenever you encounter a problem in Scripture, or in life for that matter, the way out is never around; it’s always through. It’s not avoiding the elephant, but staring it down and even wrestling it if need be. The way is the truth and the truth is the life. So let’s take a closer look at our text: Eternal conscious torment during dinner is not the only confusing thing about the story. The story raises other questions as well like: Why does Jesus name the beggar? “*Lazarus*” is the only character in all of Jesus’ stories that has a name. And why did Jesus mention purple, fine linen, sores, crumbs, dogs, and the five brothers of the rich man who have, “*the law and the prophets*”? And what’s up with Hades, the chosen, and the flame (singular, not flames, but this flame)? And is heaven Abraham’s bosom?

[Image of Fat Bastard (from the movie *Austin Powers*) without a shirt on and a towel around his waist]

I picture something like that, and I don’t want to go there! I wonder, “Could we pick a different bosom?” And one last minor question: Where is God in the story?

Well, Jesus didn’t tell the story in a vacuum. He told it to Pharisees. That means “the separate ones.” He once told them, “*You are of your father, the devil,*” that’s Dr. Evil (John 8: 44) “*And he is the father of lies.*” See? The devil can’t create a real person, only a false person. Actually, he causes us to create the false self and he does it with a lie: “You must make yourself in the image of God.” “You must justify yourself with the knowledge of good and evil,” (the law). So Jesus tells the stories to Pharisees—Jewish Pharisees—the proud men of Judah.

Judah was the royal tribe (David and Jesus were from Judah.) Jesus is “*the lion of the tribe of Judah,*” and he’s our High Priest. Judah was what was left of the twelve tribes of Israel, so Judah had the royal purple, the fine linen of the priesthood, and the law and the prophets. Judah was rich with the grace of God, and the Pharisees thought they had earned the blessing. They justified themselves. The man, Judah, was one of the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel, who was the son of Isaac, who was the promised son of Abraham.

Judah had eleven brothers (but six of them were half-brothers). Judah actually had five brothers through his mother, Leah, and his father, Israel. Most folks aren’t aware of that, but believe me: The Pharisees were very aware of that and proud of that. That was a way in which they justified themselves and their money. Money is how we quantify human effort (work). The Pharisees justified themselves with works of the law. They worked for their money and their righteousness.

Luke 16:14 - 15 Jesus tells them and us, a story.

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men,

but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

- He then, in verses 16 – 18, says two things that thoroughly implicate the Pharisees as men who break covenant and crucify the Messiah.
- And maybe we *all* crucify the Messiah?
That is, we “*take the kingdom by violence,*” in Jesus’ words.

Luke 16:16 – 21

“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

So, to the Pharisees—the spiritually wealthy, separate ones Jesus says,

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs, which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

- “Sores” is an important touch, for open sores were not allowed in the temple. And the temple was a banquet, where God and His people feasted on roast lamb, bread, and wine.
- “Dogs” is a reference to Gentiles.¹

Well, this beggar appears to be a hated Gentile, full of sores, shut out, lying just outside the gate. . . Next verse:

Luke 16:22

“So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

- “Torments” is the Greek noun, *bazono*. It literally means, “Touchstone,” or “test stone.”
- It refers to testing precious metals, by scraping them on the stone.
- It’s not something you do to something already condemned, but to something you expect to be very valuable.

“Torments in Hades”

¹ Last year, we preached about the time a Gentile woman (half Phoenician and half Syrian) begged Jesus for mercy and He said, “*It’s not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs*” and she said, “*even the dogs get the crumbs under the table,*” and Jesus healed her daughter revealing that she was actually one of the children, a lost sheep of the house of Israel.

- The King James version translated this, “Hell,” but there really are no Greek or Hebrew words equivalent to the English word Hell.
- *Hades* translates the Hebrew word, *Sheol*.
- Both *Sheol* and *Hades* are often translated as “grave.”
- In the Old Testament, Job talks about hiding from God’s wrath in *Sheol*.
- But in Deuteronomy, God reveals that His fire reaches even to the depths of *Sheol*.
- Jesus referred to *Sheol* as “outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth.”
- “*Sheol*” is separation and the Pharisees wanted to be “*The Separate*.”

According to Psalm 6, in *Sheol/Hades*, no one remembers God . . .

And yet, God remembers them.

In Psalm 139, He’s even *with* them.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon seems to say, that all men (good and bad) go to *Hades*.²

- So it wouldn’t have been clear to Jesus and His listeners that Lazarus or Abraham were in what we refer to as “heaven” . . . but they must have wondered.
- They were across a chasm . . . just like the Promised Land was across a chasm, a chasm that we now call the Jordan Rift Valley.
- They were on the other side of a chasm at a great banquet. And the banquet explained the bosom.
- You may remember that at the Last Supper, John was said to rest on Jesus’ bosom. In that day, they reclined on their left elbows at banquets, so the person to your right, facing the table, was said to be in your “*bosom*.”
- John 1 claims: “*Jesus is from the bosom of the Father.*”
- The beggar, excluded from the rich man’s banquet, is in “*Abraham’s bosom*.”
- The beggar is “*bosom buddies*” with Father Abraham . . . And I bet that burned the rich man.

Jesus had already said to the Jews, (Luke 13:28, Matthew 8:11), the men of Judah:

*“I tell you, men will come from East and West and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, while the **sons of the kingdom** will be thrown into outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

This place . . . sounds just exactly like that place.

Luke 16:24

“Then he (the rich man) cried and said, ‘Father Abraham,

(He calls him, “father” . . . or maybe “grandfather.”)

have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”

Now this is strange:

He isn’t begging God for mercy, (as if he doesn’t know God or see God).

He isn’t begging God for mercy, but Abraham.

² And it seems there are different levels in Hades

And he refers to Lazarus as if he is the family slave: “*Tell him to fetch me a drop of water to cool my tongue.*” What a weird request! Is his tongue on fire? The book of James says, “*The tongue is a fire, set on fire by Gehenna,*” and Scripture says that Gehenna is set on fire by the breath of God. Maybe the rich man is rethinking something he said about Lazarus:

“*Tell Lazarus to put water on my tongue for I’m tormented,*”

And here he uses another word for torment.³

It doesn’t really refer to physical pain, but psychological pain—it’s mental anguish. This flame in Hades is causing mental anguish in the rich man . . .

Luke 16:25

But Abraham said, ‘Son, (Abraham calls him son. He really is a son of Abraham) remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.

Jesus did say, “*The measure you give is the measure you get in the judgment you pronounce (with your tongue) is the judgment you receive.*” But endless conscious torment is a measure infinitely greater than a few years of suffering the snubs of a rich man while lying at his gate. And endless bliss and heaven is hardly something that could be earned by Lazarus, no matter how well he took his temporal suffering.

Whatever the case, if, “*the measure you give is the measure you receive,*” you best not wish anyone to hell . . . and I would suggest, giving Jesus to all.

Luke 16:25 – 31

“Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from their past us.’ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house (That is, “Abraham send them to the house of Israel”), for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment. Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded the one rise from the dead.’”

What an interesting thing to say - for very soon the men of Judah (the Jews) will take Jesus (the High Priest and King of the Jews). They will take Jesus-(the promised seed of Abraham)- Word of God. They will take Jesus and have him crucified. He will rise from the dead, but most, still won’t believe; the proud men of Judah won’t believe.

It must’ve been entirely obvious to the Pharisees: the rich men in Jesus’ story is Judah.

³ *Adunao* - It’s a verb used only in three places in Scripture and all by Luke.

**The Rich Man: Judah,
Abraham's great grandson**

The purple, the linen, the law and the prophets—the son of Abraham, who has five brothers, that's Judah, and Israel is his house. "Judah" is the Jews, and Jesus thinks they're rich. Paul refers to them as rich (Romans 9). Abraham was rich. He was "*blessed to be a blessing*" to "*ALL the nations of the world.*" (Genesis 12:2)

Scripture makes it clear that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, (that is Israel), were chosen by grace; for no one deserves God's blessing. That's the point of the election: We don't choose, but God chooses to bless us through no merit of our own. So no one can boast in God's blessing; it's grace.

In Deuteronomy 9, God says to Moses and all Israel:

"Do not say in your heart . . . 'It is because of OUR righteousness (justness)'" "Know, therefore, the Lord is not giving you this good land . . . Because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people."

The Jews were "*blessed to be a blessing*" but they hung on to the blessing. The blessing is not only Promised Land, but also promised Seed. To them was given the kingdom, and the Christ, and they didn't want to share.

If you're rich and you don't share your riches with the poor, you will "justify yourself" and "villify the poor." You will convince yourself that you deserve what you have and the poor deserve what they don't have. You will convince yourself that you deserve heaven and others deserve hell. If you justify yourself, you separate yourself from others with arrogance and pride - that's self-justification. And if you justify the fact that you're "in" and others are "out," don't be surprised to find the others "in" and yourself "out" – outside . . . tormented by an unquenchable flame.

Well, the rich man justified himself. . . In fact, it seems that he's still justifying himself in Hades.

I mean he's still trying to order Lazarus around

As if he's exalted and Lazarus is humbled,

As if he's first and Lazarus the last,

As if he's the master and Lazarus is the slave.

He justifies himself. But Lazarus couldn't; he is poor.

He's poor - yet rich.

He's last - yet first.

He's humbled - yet justified.

Who's Lazarus?

Well, I find this utterly fascinating: "*Lazarus*" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, "*Eliezer*."

And that name is formed with two words: *El*, which was the ancient generic name for *God* among the people of the ancient near East and *Ayzer*, which means: "*help*." In the garden, Adam couldn't find an *Ayzer*, a "*helper fit for him*." And the rest of the Bible informs us that, "God

is our *Ayzer*." Eliezer means "God is my helper." And there's only one Eliezer in the Old Testament of whom we really know anything. And that is Eliezer of Damascus . . . Syria.

The Rich Man: Judah,
Abraham's great grandson
Lazarus: Eliezer of Damascus,
Abraham's gentile servant

And now my fellow rich American Evangelical Christians, I'm not making this up, and I did not map this out. I think we're wrestling with the Word of God—the Promised Blessing. Genesis 15:1 the Word of God appears to Abraham and says, "*Your reward will be great.*" Verse 2, Abram says to the Word of God: "*Oh Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.*" Eliezer was Abraham's Syrian servant set to inherit all of Abraham's riches—if Abraham had no heir. But Abraham's heir was the Promised Blessing (the Seed) through which God would bless all the nations of the world . . . including Syria. It seems that this Eliezer had faith in that Promised Blessing.

30 some years later, (after Isaac is born to Sarah) in Genesis 24:2, Abraham makes his "*faithful servant,*" who had "*charge over all he owned,*" place his hand "*under his thigh*" and swear an oath. That's probably a nice way to say, "Grab the sign of the covenant, Eliezer!" "Grab . . . that place the Promised Seed came from, Eliezer! Grab and swear an oath by the Promised Blessing." So Eliezer swears to find Isaac (Abraham's son) a bride to advance the Promised Seed that would be passed on through the loins of Isaac's grandson, Judah. See? If it weren't for Eliezer and his faith in the Promised Blessing, Judah wouldn't exist, the Jews wouldn't exist, the Pharisees wouldn't exist and according to the flesh; Jesus (the Promised Blessing) wouldn't exist, and you wouldn't exist! That's quite a plot twist.

So Eliezer of Damascus was Abraham's servant who appeared to be rejected, but is thoroughly accepted. He lost everything for the Promised Blessing, but Abraham was "*blessed to be a blessing to all the peoples of the world,*" including Eliezer. So, of course, Eliezer is in "*Abraham's bosom;*" and of course Judah still tries to boss him around; and of course Judah is in torment. He is jealous of Lazarus, and he cannot justify himself. His ego is being consumed by an unquenchable flame.

So will this go on forever without end? No! Because Hades can't go on forever without end.

"*Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death*" (Revelation 20:14) "*...and death will be no more...*" (Revelation 21:4)

The lake of fire is the death of death—the end of death. So the torment is not endless and the torment *has* an end. It has a *Telos*, a perfection, a purpose. It doesn't pay for Judah's sins, but maybe it is discipline for Judah's soul. He needs to feel what Lazarus felt so he can truly know what Lazarus knows: Lazarus knows that *God is "His Helper" – El – Azer - God is help.*

Well Jesus is the End, and Jesus is the Life. The life is the *end* of death. And you may say, "What about the chasm that none can cross?" Well, does that include God? Can God make a chasm so big He can't cross it? And did you notice? Something is crossing the chasm. Words are crossing the chasm and those words are the Word we are wrestling with now. Jesus is the Word through which all things are created, including chasms. And even if none "*can cross the chasm*," we know that Jesus will destroy all chasms. That's what He came to do.

John the Baptist cries out in the wilderness of the Jordan Rift Valley quoting Isaiah:

"Prepare the way of the Lord . . . Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill made a low (Literally be humbled) . . . and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."
(Revelation 21:4)

Abraham can't cross that valley, but God will level it. When Jesus is crucified, there is a great earthquake, the tombs are opened; Hades is opened. The exalted are humbled and the humbled are exalted; the first became last and the last became first. And we will all see that what is "*exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of the Lord.*" "*By works of the law no man will be justified in his sight,*" writes Paul (Romans 3:20). In his sight, "*no man can justify himself*" and "*in Christ ALL men are justified.*" "*As in Adam ALL die, so in Christ ALL will be made alive,*" writes Paul (1 Corinthians 15).

And now one last question: Where is God in this story? We know Jesus is the end: "*the Beginning and the End*" (Revelation 22:13), but what about the middle—the plot? Well, He must be suffering with Eliezer, "*the last and the least of these.*" So, what we do to Eliezer of Damascus, Syria we do to Jesus.⁴

But what about the rich man in Hades? Isn't the rich man "*the last and least of these?*" If you consign someone to hell, don't you send Jesus there with Him?

Well, what is that flame?

In Hades, there is a flame that torments "*sons of the kingdom.*" Is it trying to kill them—this flame?" The Greek word is *phlox*, and in the New Testament it only appears in the singular and only in seven places:

"God makes his messengers a flame of fire." (Hebrews 1:7)

In Acts 7:30 the angel of the Lord is a flame of fire in the burning bush.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:8 Jesus appears as a flame of fire and works *ekdikesis*, He "brings out the right." He is the Judgment of God.

And then, three times in the Revelation, the eyes of Christ are called "*a flame of fire.*"

See? No man can justify himself in "*his sight.*" And now here in Hades, that flame burns the arrogance of Judah as He gazes across the chasm. He is made jealous by love and jealous of love.

In Song of Solomon 8:6, there is a word that appears nowhere else in all of Scripture: *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)*—Flame of Yahweh. The verse reads like this:

Song of Solomon 8:6

⁴ In fact, "*El-ayzer*," *God-help* is a lot like "*Yahweh-Yasha*," *Yahweh-saves*, shortened to *Jehoshua* - that is *Jesus*.

“ . . . Love is strong as death, jealousy . . . Fierce as the grave (that is Hades/Sheol)Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very Shal-he-beth-ya(h)–the very flame of the Lord.

I'm saying, God is not Dr. Evil. God is love. And His Word is the Shal-he-beth-ya(h).

<p>The Rich Man: Judah, Abraham's great grandson Lazarus: Eliezer of Damascus, Abraham's gentile servant The Flame: <i>Shalhebethya(h)</i>, “The very flame of the Lord”</p>

“Is not my word like fire?” declares Yahweh (Jeremiah 23).

The Shal-he-beth-ya(h) is on both sides of the chasm.

It's the Love that burns at the table, in the hearts of Abraham and Lazarus.

And . . .

It's the love that burns Judah's ego as he gazes across the chasm.

One of my favorite stories is one that I heard from Tony Campolo, who heard it from Billy Graham, who told Tony that he couldn't often share it in public. It angered too many American Evangelical Christians. You know the Internet is full of videos announcing that Billy Graham denied Christ, because he once told Robert Schuler that he believed, there were people that knew Jesus, but didn't know the *name* Jesus. He said that there was a “wideness in God's mercy.”

Pharisees don't like the wideness in God's mercy.

Billy Graham shared with Tony Campolo that years ago, on an evangelism trip in China, on the way up the mountain to preach the gospel; he saw a monk on the side of the road in deep meditation. “I felt this impulse to go over and share with him the story of Jesus,” said Graham. So with his interpreter went over to the monk, opened up the Bible, and shared the gospel.

Tears began to roll down the monk's cheeks as Graham spoke. Graham handed him that Bible. Then, through the tears, the monk spoke: “You're giving me this book? How can I thank you? I have never had a gift like this. You see Sir, this Jesus that you've described to me . . . I have always known Him. And even as you were reading from this book, within me He was saying, ‘He is speaking of me . . . He is speaking of me.’ And when you said the name “Jesus,” He said to me, ‘That's My name. That's My name.’ I've always known Him, and now I know what He did for me. And now I know exactly who He is.”

That pagan monk and Jesus were like “bosom buddies.”

When you hear that story, does it burn?

Maybe the burning feels good, maybe bad . . . And probably both.
Maybe it's the *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)*.

It is the truth that burns the lie that Adam must justify himself with works of the law.
It is the grace that burns the false self that we think we are and that we have created.
It is the Consuming Fire that destroys our flesh and sets us free to love and be loved.
It is the Presence of the Father standing in the dark field with the older brother pleading with him to come join the party. It is the *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)*—the very flame of the Lord.

He was standing right in front of the Pharisees telling the story.
He burned them . . . And so they crucified Him.
But on the cross, He cried, "*Father forgive,*" and He descended into Hades to preach to the "*spirits in prison*" and "*set the captives free.*"

On Pentecost, His Spirit fell as tongues of fire on His followers, as they praised God in the language of all the nations blessing ALL the nations. Soon after that, the very worst of the Pharisees (Paul), was on his way to Damascus, Syria to hunt Christians. And the *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)*—Jesus in blinding light appeared to him, basically killed him, and then . . . set him free!

He wrote, "*It is it no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*" (Galatians 2:20).

In Romans 11, he basically explains the story of the rich man and Lazarus.
He asked, "*Has God rejected his people?*" And he answers, "*by no means!*" (Verse 1)
He goes on to say, "*Salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous.*" (Verse 11)
"*And in this way all Israel, (which is all Jews and all Judah), will be saved.*" (Verse 26).

In other words: Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom, so the rich man may be saved. To be saved is to receive love and give love. Love is Life. God is Love. And Jesus is the Life—the *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)*.

Then Paul writes Romans 11:32 "*God consigned ALL to disobedience, that he might have mercy on ALL.*"

Understand? All will be humbled and all will be exalted. Then, no one will justify himself or herself. So, all will join the party. Your Father in heaven is not Dr. Evil, But His Word is the *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)*.

And He is helping you die to your old man in order to reveal your new man. Paul wrote, "*If we are joined with him in a death like his, we will surely be joined with him in a resurrection like his.*" (2 Timothy 2:11)

Communion

The *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)* took the bread and broke it saying, "*This is my body given to you; take and eat and do this in remembrance of me.*" And He took the cup saying, "*This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you and do it in remembrance of me.*"

This is the table—the banqueting table of the Lord.
And I believe it is the *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)*.

Run from it and it will follow you into the darkness, and it will burn.
Surrender to it and you will be made in the image of God.

Your Father is not Dr. Evil. Your Father is Love.

When you have come to know that, “*You will love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself.*” (Luke 10:27) “Bosom-buddies.”

Benediction

Close your eyes and watch and pray. I believe that you can stand before the throne right now. Jesus is actually here. In your mind's eye, just look at Him, because He is looking at you. There is fire in His eyes. Does it burn? If the burning is bad, I think it's because you are trying to justify yourself.

Maybe there is someone that you refuse to forgive, and you are trying to justify that.

Maybe you're afraid, and you're trying to justify that.

Maybe you're addicted to something and you're trying to justify that.

You don't have to understand it. You actually can't fix it. All you can do by God's grace is confess it. Just give it to Jesus. The fire in His eye is love for you. At the same time it is wrath over the lies that you have believed and that have kept you in bondage to evil. He wants you to confess it; for He takes it to the Valley of Gehenna where He consumes it in absolute love so you can come inside the City and join the party that never ends, because it is full of the End; it is full of Jesus!

Believe the Gospel.

Your Father is *not* Dr. Evil

Your Father is Love

His Word is the *Shal-he-beth-ya(h)*

And He is in your heart; you just ate Him at the communion table.

Rejoice, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.