

The Thing That Made Dr. Evil Repent

Luke 16:13-31

21 in stories Jesus told series

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

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.]

Mustafa: *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 fire 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.*

Mustafa: (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!*

Message

Last weekend, I preached a sermon titled, “The Rich Man, Lazarus, and Dr. Evil.” We watched that clip; I read the story; and then I addressed an “elephant in the room.”

[Image of elephant in an office building during a meeting]

I said, “The elephant is a question, and this is the question: “Is God Dr. Evil?” By that I meant, “Does He torture some people endlessly in flames, while enjoying an endless banquet of love with others?” Now there are many ways to view this story and I’m not saying you have to agree with me. But I am saying that if you view this story through the lens of popular Christianity, God does look a lot like Dr. Evil. However, if you look through the lens of biblical Christianity, things begin to change in a fascinating way.

So last time we noted the following:

Jewish Pharisees: The proud men of *Judah*, “who justify themselves.”

Rich man: At least *Judah*, Abraham’s great grandson who had purple, linen, the law and prophets, and five brothers.

Lazarus: At least *Eliezer* of Damascus, Abraham’s Syrian Gentile servant set to inherit Abraham’s “house” if Abraham had no heir (Genesis 15:2).

Abraham: *Abraham*, who argued with God begging him to not destroy Sodom with fire (Genesis 18:16- 33, Ezekiel Dickstein: 53-63).

This Flame: “*Love . . .* The very flame of the Lord (*Shalhebetya*, Song of Solomon 8:6)”

Chasm: Jesus came to destroy chasms (Luke 3:5), raise *Judah* from Hades and bring the house of Israel into the land (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

1. Jesus was speaking to Pharisees (the proud men of *Judah* who “justified themselves”).
2. The rich man is, at least, *Judah* (Abraham’s great-grandson) who had the purple, the linen, the law and the prophets, and five brothers.
3. Lazarus is at least *Eliezer* of Damascus (Abraham’s Syrian Gentile servant set to inherit Abraham’s house if Abraham has no heir. (Genesis 15:2)
4. Abraham is *Abraham*, who has a fascinating knowledge of “*consuming fire*.” I didn’t mention this last time, but in Genesis 18, Abraham has an extended conversation with a God-man, begging Him not to destroy Sodom with eternal fire. Yet Ezekiel reveals God will “*restore Sodom*.” He annihilates her and re-creates her with eternal fire. Abraham now seems to be at peace with this fire.
5. “This flame” (in Hades) must be *Shal-he-beth-yah*—the “*very flame of the Lord*,” the manifestation of God, and God is love.
6. None can cross the chasm, but Luke has already told us: Jesus came to destroy chasms. And (according to Ezekiel 37) raise the men of *Judah* from Hades and lead them into the Promised Land.

Well once you read, through that lens, the story is not unconscionable: God is not Dr. Evil; God is Love, and His Word is the *Shal-he-beth-yah*.

Once you know that your Father is *not* Dr. Evil, but instead absolute *love* (and not dead love, but living love), it changes every breath you take and every move you make. “...*You shall love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*” (Luke 10:27)

People ask: “Peter, what does this theology mean?”

Listen closely: It simply means that you can be a Christian, and you have Good News you want to share with everyone, everywhere (That's an evangelical Christian).

Once you read the story through a biblical lens, it's no longer unconscionable, but Gospel—really, really good news! It's no longer unconscionable, but it *is* a bit shocking. I mean the people you thought were not “saved” (Syrian Gentile beggars) seem to be “saved.” And the people you thought for sure were “saved” - religious people, who have the Bible and say, “*Lord, Lord and do many mighty works in His name*” “*the sons of the kingdom*” are in “*outer darkness weeping and gnashing their teeth.*”-Not saved, if not endlessly, at least for a time, perhaps even an age (-an *aion*).

So, the story is no longer unconscionable, but it *is* a bit terrifying . . . It is terrifying, not because God is evil but because God is absolutely good! And we are not so good, and God is bound and determined to make each of us in His own image. You see? This is not a story about endless conscious torment for other people. This is a story about God's discipline for the sons of the Kingdom. That could be us.

God is love, and we are His children. And “*The Lord disciplines those He loves*”—that is us. And so perhaps you're thinking “Dang . . . I need to repent! How do I repent? . . .” Well, good question. This story isn't just about the rich man named Judah—it's also you. A Christian is rich and a Christian has been grafted into the family tree of Judah, even betrothed to the King of Judah. You are rich—with the Promised Blessing, and most of you, relative to the world, are rich with money. You are rich, you were once like Lazarus, but now, Bride of Christ, you are married to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah,. You are His Body and His Bride, and it's all a gift. So don't you dare try to justify yourself.

You are rich and each of us has at least one Lazarus lying just outside our gate. Inside your gate, you feel safe and think you're in control. Lazarus threatens that control and makes you feel unsafe. Lazarus is “*The last and least of these.*” Lazarus is the person that you have shut out. Lazarus could be a homeless beggar or a Syrian refugee. Now you can debate how to best love Lazarus—more money spent on border control, or less. You can debate how to best love Lazarus, *but you must* love Lazarus.

Lazarus may be a Syrian or a poor beggar, or Lazarus may be rich. In John 11, just a bit before He's crucified, Jesus raises a man named Lazarus from the dead, but that man is not a poor Gentile beggar. He is a rich man of Judah. His daughter, Mary, has a bottle of perfume valued at an entire year's wage . . . and she dumped it on Jesus.

I'm saying, you each have a “Lazarus.” It's the one you consider “*last and least of these,*” the one that threatens your control and sense of safety, the one you refuse to tolerate, the one you will not forgive. It could be a beggar, could be a Syrian, it could be your husband or wife.

Last week, I kept thinking about Austin Powers and Dr. Evil (As if they were like Lazarus to each other). This week I kept thinking about Henry Bemis, his wife Helen, and the *Twilight Zone*. Henry Bemis likes stories *about* people, but not people. And once you meet Helen, you understand why.

Clip from *Twilight Zone*

[The scene opens to show Henry Bemis, wearing thick glasses, seated on a comfortable chair in his living room reading a paper.]

Helen: (from another room) *Hen-ry-y-y!*

[Henry slightly rolls his eyes, sighs, and goes on reading his paper.]

Helen: (sharply) *Henry!*

[Henry pauses a bit]

Henry: (over his shoulder) *Yes dear? I'm in the living room!* (He goes back to reading his paper.)

[Helen walks in through the doorway at the back of the room, heels clicking on the floor, and snatches the paper out of Henry's hands, folding it back up.]

Helen: *Do you want more coffee, or don't you?*

[Henry pauses to think; his eyes move back and forth.]

Henry: (quietly) *No thank you dear.*

Helen: *Well, why don't you tell me that? And don't sneak off into the living room to bury yourself in newsprint.* (She continues to fold the paper.) *I think we've been over this quite enough, Henry. . . I won't tolerate a husband of mine sacrificing the art of conversation! We're playing cards tonight! I want you to change your shirt!*

[Henry's eyebrows rise a little.]

Helen: *We're going over to the Phillip's house.*

Henry: (muttering quietly and looking down to his left) *Oh, dear!*

Helen: *All right, Henry! Anything to say?*

[She leans over the chair back towards Henry's face threateningly. Henry shakes his head no]

Henry: *No dear, nothing to say.* (He removes his glasses.) *What time are we due there?* (He rubs the corner of his eye.)

[She stands back up straight.]

Helen: *In about 15 minutes.*

[Henry puts his glasses back on, sniffs, and looks at Helen over his shoulder.]

Henry: *I'll be ready on time.*

Helen: *See that you are!*

[The scene goes dark and re-opens to show Henry facing the hallway door in the living room and putting on a suit coat. He opens the door before him and is startled to find Helen standing in the doorway right in front the hallway.]

Helen: *Ohhh!*

[Henry steps back, startled.]

Helen: *Henry?*

Henry: *Yes, . . . My dear?*

Helen: (Stepping slowly into the room, she reaches for his suit coat) *What have you got, Henry?*

[She steps back and looks at him. He smiles guiltily.]

Henry: (puzzled and smiling nervously) *Got?*

Helen: *Got!*

Henry: (Shaking his head and raising his hands to his sides as he shrugs innocently) *Nothing, my dear.* (He shrugs again).

[Helen reaches in to his suit coat and pulls out a book.]

Clip from *Twilight Zone* continued

Helen: *What's this?*

Henry: (He continues to smile with his mouth closed.) *What? That?* (His voice rises as he points quickly at the book in her hands.)

Helen: *Yes, this.*

Henry: *This? Isn't that odd? Now, how did that get here?* (He reaches for his pocket as the scene goes black.)

We each have a “Lazarus” lying at the gate of our city—that is our soul. Helen was Henry’s “Lazarus,” the threat to his autonomy, safety, and control.

Well, as we discussed last time, Jesus is talking to Jewish Pharisees (Luke 16:14) who justify themselves (Luke 16:15). And Jesus says, “*What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of the Lord.*” Wouldn’t that be autonomy, safety and control? “*What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of the Lord.*” Then 16: 9, Jesus tells our story.

Luke 16:19-26

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, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he 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, and likewise Lazarus; 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 . . .”

Who would want to pass from there to Hades?

Who would want to “*not count equality with God a thing to be held onto,*” but would want to “*empty himself taking the form of the slave*” (Philippians 2:6) and “*descended into Hades*” (Ephesians 4:9)? No mere man could do it, and most definitely, no mere man would want to do it . . . But what about the One who “fixed the chasm” and came to “level all valleys?” What does *He* want?

Luke 16:26-31

And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm, 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 (that’s Lazarus) 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 (allow this to happen) 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.”

Well now that we’ve dealt with the elephant in the room, the story does raise some obvious questions:

1. What makes a person "repent?"
2. What does it mean to be "persuaded?"
3. What is "salvation?"

What does make a person "repent?"

What does it mean to be "persuaded?"

What's the difference between Hades and Heaven? What *is* salvation?

So what does make a person repent? Ever thought about that? Abraham says, "*They have the law and the prophets*" that's the Bible. . . (Or at least most of it.) To the Pharisees, Jesus says,

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have life. And it is they that bear witness to me yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

The Pharisees wanted "knowledge of the good." Yet they crucified the Good; that is...God in flesh.

Henry Bemis wanted "knowledge of people"-(written stories), but he didn't want people—living stories. Like Helen, they're hard to control and a pain in the ass, side, or bosom. The rich man's brothers have the Bible and the rich man suggests that they should also get Lazarus, risen from the dead. Ironically, they get a man named Lazarus, actually risen from the dead in John 11:44. In John 11:47, the Pharisees believe that Jesus performed this sign and so John 11:3, "*They conspired to have Him killed.*" They *do*, and Jesus rises from the dead, and they still are NOT "*persuaded.*" It seems that you can believe Jesus rose from the dead and still not be persuaded—not persuaded in the way that Jesus wants you to be persuaded. You can believe the Bible and believe in miracles and still be an "*evil and adulterous generation*" (Matthew 16:4).

When I was younger, I used to spend a good deal of time arguing with people that the Bible is true and Jesus rose from the dead. And I believe the Bible *is* true, and I've seen amazing miracles. Jesus *did* rise from the dead, but I don't spend much time arguing about it (though I'm glad to talk about it with people that want to believe it), for unless you want to believe it, you won't believe it—the way Jesus wants you to believe it. He wants you to be *persuaded*.

You know, just like the rich man in the story, the Pharisees believed the Bible. And the Pharisees believed that God raises the dead (That's what distinguished them from the Sadducees). They believed the Bible. They believed God raised the dead. But they couldn't be *persuaded* to love Lazarus, or Gentiles, or Syrians, or tax collectors, or sinners—"the last and least of these their brethren."

Did you notice that Abraham said, "*Let them hear the law and the prophets*"—as if forcing the miracle on them might destroy their faith? As if, arguing that they had to believe might prevent them from "being persuaded" in the way Jesus wanted them to be *persuaded*? Remember how Jesus would refuse to do

“mighty works” if people lacked faith? As if forcing them to *have* to believe in love (and God is Love), would keep them from falling in love with Love. That is, “*being persuaded.*” *Peitho* is the Greek verb. It means to cause someone to trust, and trust means faith. It can also be translated “seduce” or “romance.”

You may remember Soren Kierkegaard’s story about the king that fell in love with the peasant girl as he gazed at her from a distance. He realized that if he revealed his status, riches, and glory, he wouldn’t know, and she wouldn’t know, if she loved him or just his riches. And if he *forced* her to love him with the logical benefits of marrying the king, or forced her with the strength of his army, she wouldn’t love him, but only fear his power. So he realized that if she were to be romanced, seduced, or persuaded to fall in love with him, he would need “*to empty himself of equality with the king and take the form of a slave*” and serve her”. He would have to make himself one like Lazarus, in the hope that she would see his heart, and trust him—*peitho*—be “persuaded.”

He didn’t care whether or not she believed that the great king existed. He cared that she would come to trust his heart, that she would be persuaded that he was her beloved, her “*Ezer*” (Hebrews 17). In the beginning, Adam couldn’t find his “*Ezer (Ayzer)*”—his helper, so God makes Adam into Adam and Eve. And the rest of the Bible is the story of how God reveals to humanity: “*I am your Ezer,*” your Husband. Jesus is the Groom, and we are the Bride. I wonder if He’d make Himself one like Eliezer in order to “*persuade*” us?

Well, the proud men of Judah and the house of Israel believe the law and the prophets, but still are not persuaded. They believe God raises the dead, but still will not be persuaded. The men of Judah have the Bible, and the men of Judah will witness a man risen from the dead, and the men of Judah have one other thing: They have Lazarus, but not risen from the dead like Jacob Marley in the Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens. They have Lazarus, that is Eliezer, hidden in “*the last and least of these, our brethren.*”

As I mentioned last time, “*Lazarus*” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, “*Eliezer.*” *El* is the generic and Gentile word for God. *Ezer* means help, helper, or husband. “*Eliezer*” means “*God is help.*” *Jesus* is the English form of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, which means, “*Yahweh is salvation or help.*” I’m not exactly sure what to make of that . . . But I do know that on that day, Jesus will say, “*Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me*” (Matthew 25:40). That’s the judgment.

Well, if you surrender to the call of love in your Lazarus, aren’t you surrendering to Jesus? Jesus is what Mother Teresa called “His distressing disguise.”

Well, no matter what you think of these wild ideas, I hope you see the incredible irony in this story. The rich man sees heaven (or a picture of heaven) from what we would call hell. And it turns out that heaven is what he had, or could have had all along! I mean, “*The kingdom of heaven*” was “*at hand*” in Lazarus, whom he kept outside his gate . . . The very same Lazarus he now wishes to send to his brothers. It’s like heaven and hell were both “*at hand.*”

Read Scripture, and you’ll see that heaven and hades both begin here . . . Or were always here. And what we experience depends on what we see . . . If he would’ve *seen* Lazarus, he would’ve discovered that Lazarus has an absolutely breathtaking story (just as we saw last time). But more than “has a story,” Lazarus “is a story.” He not only contains knowledge of love. He contains the presence of love and God is love. So if the rich man would’ve truly seen Lazarus at his gate, he could’ve feasted with Lazarus every day, like he watches Abraham feast with him now—if he would’ve seen, but he didn’t want to see. And now, in Hades, the vision burns. He sees that he didn’t see, but *now* he is beginning to *want* to see.

The rich man reminds me of Henry Bemis. One day, Henry Bemis emerges from a bank vault where he had escaped from people, to read a book. And he finds that a hydrogen bomb had gone off. Armageddon had happened and killed all the people.

Clip 2 from *Twilight Zone*

[The clip opens to show a black and white image of Henry walking amidst a war zone, stepping over broken bits of buildings and stumbling as he walks through the ruins of his city.]

Narrator: (In a monotone voice) *Seconds, minutes, hours, they crawled by on hands and knees for Mr. Henry Bemis, who looks for a spark in the ashes of a dead world...*

[Henry picks up a phone on a broken wall and tries it to see if it works.]

Narrator: *A telephone connected to nothingness. . . a neighborhood bar, a movie, a baseball diamond, a hardware store, the mailbox . . .*

[Henry bends down to look at a broken rock wall and read a mailbox label.]

Narrator: *of what was once his house and is now rubble. They lie at his feet as battered monuments to what was and is no more.*

Henry: *Helen!* (He steps up on a broken wall to look about as he calls out.) *Helen! Where are you?*

[He looks about in the gloom and suddenly spots something down in front of him.]

Narrator: *Mr. Henry Bemis, on an eight-hour tour of a graveyard.*

[Henry comes upon a pillar with a sign on it saying "Public Library," then he moves on to climb up some stairs picking up books and putting them down as he goes.]

Henry: (excitedly reading a cover aloud) *Collected works of Dickens!*

[He moves up some more stairs and reads another book cover.]

Henry: *Collected works of George Bernard Shaw!* (Picking up another book) *Poems by Browning, Shelley, Keats!*

[He drops the book and picks up another.]

Henry: *Great authors of the world!* (He stumbles on) *Books!* (He finds a broken shelving unit with the books left on it.) *Books! All the books I'll need!*

[He pulls and knocks all the books off the shelf.]

Henry: *All the books! All the books I'll ever want!*

[The scene fades and opens to show Henry walking down the library steps, with an arm full of books on one side hand waving on the other.]

Henry: *This year. Next year. And the year after. And the year after that. And the year after that!* (He smacks his hands together with his arms still wrapped around a handful of books.) *Ahhh!*

[Sitting down among neatly stacked books, he sets his handful of books down and looks around to see a single book lying under a clock. As he bends down and reaches for that book, his glasses fall off. A blurry image of his glasses next to the book is shown. Henry reaches down and feels around for his glasses finding the book, and then his glasses. He picks them up to put them on and the lenses fall out.]

Henry: (Crying) *It's not fair. It's not fair!*

[The camera backs up to show him standing alone and weeping in front of a stack of books on the stairs of a ruined library as his broken glasses dangle from one hand.]

Narrator: *The best laid plans, of mice and men, . . . and Henry Bemis. Henry Bemis, now just a part of a smashed landscape.*

[An image of Henry on the steps changes to show the broken fields he walked through.]

Narrator: *Just a fragment of what man has deeded to himself. Mr. Henry Bemis, . . . In the twilight zone.*

[The image pans up and changes to a view of the night sky full of sparkling stars.]

Henry Bemis sees that he doesn't see, and he wants to see. He sees that he needs new glasses. And maybe he's beginning to see that he always needed new glasses. I mean, he always could see stories *about* love, but he couldn't see love and became part of the story of love. He didn't want to see *Helen*.

A written story about love was something he could possess and make part of *his* plans, he could “deed it” to himself. But *love* would possess him and make him part of *her* plans, and covenant him to herself. You can control a book, but not a Helen. Amen?

You can control “knowledge of love.” But love cannot be controlled and is often a pain in the a___, side or bosom. And so Henry searched his books thinking that in them was life, and it’s they that bear witness to love. Yet he refused to surrender to love that he might have life. Henry wanted to possess stories *about* love and so wouldn’t be possessed by love and become part of the story—the love story.

There may have been something very similar going on with Helen But I’ll let a marriage counselor explain that to you. They both wanted to *possess* love...and so *crucified* love, and could not *know* love, unless of course, Love was to rise from the dead.

They both wanted to possess love, but life is allowing Love to possess you!

Well, anyway, Henry had books *about* love, but didn’t *know* love. And here’s another tragic irony: because Henry refused to surrender to love, he never really understood the books anyway.

The Pharisees memorized the book and crucified the Meaning (the Logos).

Well, the rich man in Hades sees that he doesn’t see, and yet he begins to want to see. As we said last time, Hades is not the end, Jesus is *always* the End. Yet on your way to the end, I’d advise you to do all you can, to avoid any time in Hades.

Well, the rich man was in Hades, but I think he’d always lived in the twilight zone. This world is the twilight zone, like a boundary between Heaven and Hades, creation and chaos, love and not love, light and dark, God and not God. And the issue is not, “Do you know that you’re supposed to feed beggars?” (The Pharisees knew that. It’s in the law and the prophets.) And the issue is not, “Do you know that a man rose from the dead?” but, “Do you want Jesus to rise from the dead?”

And the issue is not, “Do you see beggars?”
But, “Do you *want* to see Eliezer . . . Or Jesus?”
“Do you want to meet your Helper, your Husband, your *Ezer*?”

I imagine that Eliezer knew that God was his helper. And maybe Eliezer could’ve helped the rich man to see that God was his helper too . . . Maybe King Jesus is in Lazarus in “distressing disguise” persuading the rich man to love Love. God is love, and He’s persuading you to love Love. He’s constantly asking, “Adam - Who’s your helper?” “Do you see me? Do you want me?” “I *Am* Love.”

Paul prays that the “*Eyes of our hearts would be enlightened*” and we would know (Ephesians 1:18-19):

1. The “hope to which we are called.” (It’s a Banquet.)
2. The “riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (there is a treasure in Abraham and Lazarus). The treasure circulates between the two of them.
3. The “immeasurable greatness of his power is us who have faith.” Faith is God’s power in us. It’s not exalted among men, but anything other than faith in Love is an abomination in the sight of God.

So, the story made us ask:

1. What makes a person "repent?"
2. What does it mean to be "persuaded?"
3. What is "salvation?"

Number three: What is it to be saved?

Isn't it the ability to enjoy the banquet of Love? And God is Love.

1. What makes a person "repent?"
2. What does it mean to be "persuaded?"
3. What is "salvation?"
The ability to enjoy the banquet of Love—
God is Love.

And number two: What does it mean to be persuaded?

Isn't it to have faith in Love; to love Love...

Evidenced by the fact that you'd *want* to invite Lazarus to dinner (you love Love)?

1. What makes a person "repent?"
2. What does it mean to be "persuaded?"
It is to have faith in Love; to love Love.
3. What is "salvation?"
The ability to enjoy the banquet of Love—
God is Love.

And number one: What makes a person "repent?" In other words, "What creates faith in love?" Is it a book? Is it seeking a miracle?

In Romans 2:4 Paul writes about judgment and then says, “*Don’t you know that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*”¹

Then, in Romans 12:20, having explained the judgment of grace, Paul writes, “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.*”

In other words, “Be kind to your enemy and you will burn him.” He talks as if love is the “*very flame of the Lord,*” the *Shal-he-beth-yah*, the breath of Yahweh, the Word of Yahweh. “Be kind and you will breathe fire and burn your enemy. And that kindness leads to repentance, but not only in your enemy, also in you. And maybe, just maybe, you are your own worst enemy, as if Dr. Evil were a lie, having taken up residence in you.

For nine years, I was a youth pastor in California and routinely (sometimes several times each year) I would take the kids to build houses for the poor in the abandoned Tijuana dump. I’ve been all over the world, including Mozambique, which, at the time, was the poorest country in the world, but I’ve never seen poverty like I did in the Tijuana dump.

Families lived there, sorting through trash to keep themselves alive. One week, we arrived just after a young mother gave birth to a baby under an old carpet slung over a rope. From the dump, you could see San Diego, so you see the poverty wasn’t just physical. Many were Indians or Mestizo and so rejected by their fellow Mexicans, and they were all rejected by America.

I’m not making a political argument here. I’m just telling you that they were like Lazarus, and we were rich. We came from Bel Air Presbyterian Church. And like I said, we came several times a year. But it wasn’t always like that. When I first arrived, we had an evangelism canoe trip. The idea was to entice these kids with canoeing and then persuade them each night with convincing tales of great miracles and reasoned arguments from the Bible.

We had an evangelism canoe trip and I also introduced the Mexico trip. It was only for kids that were already committed—hard-core Christians. Well after the first year, I couldn’t get anyone to go on the canoe trip and everyone wanted to go on the Mexico trip. But worse than that, for nine years, kids would “repent” and be “persuaded” on the wrong trip.

Very few were persuaded to believe on the evangelism canoe trip. But on the Mexico trip, when supposedly they had already been persuaded, around the campfire every night after a day of sweat and stink and painful love, they would keep standing up and saying stuff like: “For the first time I believe in God,” and “I want to surrender my life to Him.” And it wasn’t my convincing biblical arguments and they didn’t see what we would call a “miracle.” But for the first time, kids from Bel Air California, (some rich beyond your wildest dreams) felt a fire burning in their veins and the fire flowed from them to destitute Mexicans and flowed from those Mexicans back to them across the chasm.

It wasn’t always pretty, it was usually very messy but they knew it was not only them; that fire was not of them. So all I had to do was tell them, “I think that’s the life of God.” “It’s the *Shal-he-beth-yah.*” It’s kindness revealed in weakness. It’s the love that is unearned and free. It’s grace; trust Him. He is our Helper. It was then that they heard the law and the prophets. It was then that dead words became living Word. Not dead love—Living Love and Love makes a person repent.

¹ Some versions say “*is meant to lead you*” apparently because they don’t have faith in the power of love, for the text is clear, “*God’s kindness leads you to repentance.*”

1. What makes a person "repent?"
Love makes a person repent.
2. What does it mean to be "persuaded?"
It is to have faith in Love; to Love Love.
3. What is "salvation?"
The ability to enjoy the banquet of Love—
God is Love.

And now you may say, "Whoa! Wait just a minute!"

Are you saying the plan of salvation is not essential?
Are you making the death and resurrection of Jesus something small?
Are you saying faith doesn't matter?

NO! I'm saying faith is the *only* thing that matters. And the death and resurrection of Jesus isn't small, it's bigger than you ever imagined. The plan of salvation is an entire new creation. I'm saying that when you love, the life of Love is rising from the dead in you. If you take credit for the love, you crucify Love. But if you're grateful for Love, you are the Body of Love. To put it in theological jargon: If you believe, like the Pharisees, that you can justify yourself with works of love, you kill love. But if you believe that Love has justified you, you are the living, breathing Body of Love.

In the language of Scripture: "*You have been granted repentance*" (Acts 11:18). Repentance is a gift, and if you don't think so you're not repenting.

When you have faith in Love and therefore love, because you want to love, it's not just you.
It's Christ Jesus rising from the dead in you.

It's not the result of words; it is the Word.

It's not the result of seeing a miracle; it *is* the Miracle.

God is love and God creates faith in Love.

Love repents you and He uses Lazarus to do it. You don't have to travel to Mexico or Syria to find Lazarus. God has provided each of you with a Lazarus—someone that you think does not deserve your love, but God is calling you to love that you might learn that love is undeserved and free.

In other words, love is not a dead thing you can control. Love is your living Lord, and nothing is as powerful as He. And it's always true that we "*love because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). First love was revealed at the cross. He said, "*When I am lifted up I will romance all people to myself*" (John 12:32) And He spoke of His cross. Yet Christ was crucified from "*the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians 1:4) And He is rising in every moment of space and time. He is the Word of Love through which all things are created, especially you. So when it was clear that none of us deserved love or could make ourselves love, when it was clear that we were poor and could not help ourselves, God spoke His Word into the abyss and revealed that He is our Helper, our "*Ezer*."

Communion

That is, on the night that He was betrayed, He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body which is given to you." And He took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood." God spoke His Word into the abyss and revealed that He is our "Helper," our "Ezer." I suspect that Lazarus knew that, for he couldn't help himself. The rich man will also know that once he realizes that "God is his helper" and he can't help himself. And if you think: "Gosh, I wonder if I realize that?" "I better repent. How do I repent?"

Well, check this out:

1. What makes a person "repent?"
Love makes a person repent.
- So let the Word of Love burn you and create you in His own image.
- Pay attention to your Lazarus.
- Whenever and wherever you sense Love, surrender to Love, Love is repenting you.
2. What does it mean to be "persuaded?"
It is to have faith in Love; to Love Love.
3. What is "salvation?"
The ability to enjoy the banquet of Love—
God is Love.

I'd suggest:

1. Chew on this story and let it burn you. Maybe it's not a dead story, but a living Word.
2. Pay attention to your "Lazarus," the one just outside your gate (he is not there by accident).
3. When you feel or see Love, surrender to Love. Love is repenting you and in this is love. [Peter points to the communion table.] The dark up is wine, the light cup is juice. They are both fire.

[The worship band sings "Power of Love" by Huey Lewis and the News]

The power of love is a curious thing
Make a one man weep, make another man sing
Change a hawk to a little white dove
More than a feeling that's the power of love

Tougher than diamonds, whips like cream
Stronger and harder than a bad girl's dream
Make a bad one good, make a wrong one right
Power of love will keep you home at night

It don't need money, don't take fame
Don't need no credit card to ride this train
It's strong and it's sudden and it's cruel sometimes
But it might just save your life
That's the power of love, that's the power of love

First time you feel it, it might make you sad
Next time you feel it, it might make you mad

But you'll be glad, baby when you've found
That's the power, makes the world go round

And it don't need money, don't take fame
Don't need no credit card to ride this train
It's strong and it's sudden and it's cruel sometimes
But it might just save your life

They say that all in love is fair
Yeah but you don't care
But you know what to do
When it gets hold of you

And with a little help from above
You feel the power of love
You feel the power of love, can you feel it?

It don't take money, don't take fame
Don't need no credit card to ride this train
Tougher than diamonds and stronger than steel
You wont feel it when until you feel

You feel the power, just feel the power of love
That's the power and that's the power of love
You feel the power of love, you feel the power of love
You feel the power of love

Benediction

I don't know if Huey Lewis and the News knew just how right they were. But nothing is more powerful than love. God is love. And in the end, love can even make Dr. Evil repent. Last week, I mentioned that the devil reminds me of Dr. Evil. But I don't think the devil is a person, so I doubt he can repent because there's nothing there to repent. However, the devil is the "father of lies." And with lies he makes evil (like Dr. evil and the Pharisees). And yet in that place, when and where we know that we don't deserve love, God reveals love, kindness in the midst of our failure. Love is our Father and with His Word of Love, He repents us and makes us in His image. I began with Dr. Evil, and I just want to show you that the end of Dr. evil is love.

Clip from *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*

[Dr. Evil is standing in his laboratory in a white suit with his hands raised. He mouths the word "No." And shakes his hand in the air as he steps back. The scene shifts to show Austin Powers aiming a gun at him.]

Dad: *What are you going to do now Austin? Hmm?*

[The scene shifts back to show Dr. Evil and Austin Powers's dad standing in the background. The dad walks forward and Dr. Evil turns to look at him in surprise.]

Austin: *Dad? (He waves his gun a little.) What are you doing here? I've got to finish this off, once and for all!*

[Dr. Evil raises his arms back up and squints, expecting to be shot. Austin's dad just waits, tilting his head. He then steps in front of Dr. Evil.]

Dad: *I'm afraid you can't do that. (He squares his shoulders and stands straight.) I have to protect . . . my son.*

Austin: *Dad, I'm fine!*

[The scene shows Austin standing next to a black woman holding a gun aimed at Dr. Evil alongside Austin Powers. Austin shakes his head to the side, takes a breath and shifts his grip on his gun.]

Dad: (quietly) *I'm not talking to you. I'm talking about . . .* (He steps aside and waves his hand at Dr. Evil) -- *Him.*

[Dr. Evil is startled and glances between Austin and his father, lowering his hands.]

Dr. Evil: (softly) *Huh?*

[The scene shifts to show Austin Powers stunned. He and the woman next to him are still holding their guns pointed at Dr. Evil and his dad.]

Austin: *What? Dr. Evil's not your son, . . . I am!* (Smiles gingerly.)

[He shakes his head no.]

Dad: *You both are.*

[Dr. Evil twitches in astonishment and looks at Dad with his mouth open.]

Dr. Evil: *uh -h?*

[The scene shifts to show two others watching it all happen, A guy with an eyepatch and Frau Farbassina. Then it shifts to show Mini-me pointing a gun at another guy wearing black, with a woman seated in the background. They are all watching as well and glance about the room in astonishment.]

Dr. Evil: *Very interesting story Mr. Powers. Of course, I'm going to have to wait until I see all the facts . . . Daddy!*

[He throws his arms around Mr. Powers. They both hug tightly, as Dr. Evil cries.]

Dr. Evil: *Ah-ha-ha-ha! Ahuhuh!*

Seated guy wearing black: *Uh! sh-sh-sh!*

Dad: *Sh-sh-sh. Daddy's here, Ducky.* (He pats Dr. Evil's back consolingly.) *Shh. Shh.*

Dr. Evil: (with a puzzled look) *Uh, Ducky?*

Dad: *Shhh.* (He strokes Dr. Evil's bald head.) *Ducky, remember the ducky from . . .*

Austin: *Dad? What's going on?*

[The dad releases Dr. Evil and stands straight looking at Austin as Dr. Evil is left moaning.]

Dad: *What are you going to do, Austin?*

[The camera focuses in on Austin's troubled face. He is still holding his gun aimed at Dr. Evil. The scene shifts to show Dr. Evil raising his hands once more, grimacing in fear of being shot. Then it shifts to Austin as he debates what to do. It shifts back and forth between the two. Then Austin puts his gun down, smiling slightly.]

Woman: (still holding her gun aimed at Dr. Evil) *Austin!*

Dr. Evil: *Huh?*

Woman: *Are you sure you can trust Dr. Evil?*

[Dr. Evil shakes his head worriedly. The woman snarls as she looks at Austin.]

Austin: *He ain't heavy! He's my brother, baby! Yeah! Uh-huh-hnnn!* (Grinning widely as Dr. Evil looks on in astonishment and his dad smiles proudly back at him.)

Dad: *Eh-heh-heh!*

Dr. Evil: (puts his arm down) *Ohhh!*

[They all laugh and scenes of everyone hugging and laughing are shown. Then Dr. Evil runs to Austin along with his father where they all smile and hug each other in joyous laughter.]

Austin: *Oh, boy! Ah-ha-heah!*

[Dr. Evil sobs as they hug. And the woman puts her gun down, nodding her head in approval.]

Dr. Evil: (leaning back from the hug and shouting) *I'm Ducky! . . . I'm Ducky! Uh-huh-huh!* (He sobs and they all continue to hug.)

That's the end of evil. J.R Tolkien said, "You cannot keep the gospel out of stories." The revelation of the Father, and the sacrifice of the Son creating a brother. Love makes Dr. Evil repent. Now, may you repent in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit of Love.

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.