

Happy Slaves and Miserable Despots

Romans 6:15-23

Romans (no. 16 in the series)

Mar 13, 2022

Peter Hiatt

Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/happy-slaves-and-miserable-despots/>

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

[Worship Song: *Gotta Serve Somebody* by Bob Dylan]

Prayer:

Father, it seems just crazy to me that you would have me talk about you, because I really cannot. But you can talk about you, Lord God. So, I pray that you would overcome me, and we would learn about I am—I am that I am—that you would speak to us Lord God, even through your body. God those are mysteries that are so far beyond me so I'm just saying help us to preach. Amen.

Message:

In Romans 6:15, Paul is still responding to the question raised by his statemen in Romans 5:19-20:

“For as by one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Now ~~the~~ law came in to increase the trespass, but where [the] sin increased [the] Grace abounded all the more.”

So, in Romans 6:15 Paul writes:

Romans 6:15-18:

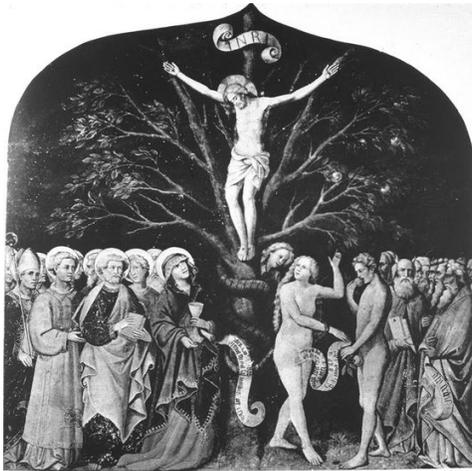
What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ **Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, ~~which leads to~~ [eis: into] death, or of obedience, ~~which leads to~~ [eis: into] righteousness?** (I apologize for all the brackets and such, but I'm trying to give you the most literal translation)ⁱ

¹⁷ **But thanks be to God, that you ~~who~~ were once slaves of [the] sin [but] ~~have become obedient~~ [you were obedient] from the heart to the ~~standard~~ [tupos: imprint] of teaching to which you were ~~committed~~ [*paradidomai*: handed over, betrayed]**

We talked about that last time: the obedience fills the empty tupos, like blood flowing from a fountain in the temple of your soul, like liquid love poured into and out of your heart from the throne of grace and filling up your empty vessel

Romans 6:18:
and, having been set free from [the] sin, have become slaves of [the] righteousness.

I've included the article, "the," because Paul includes the article, "the," and translators often take it out, and sometimes they put it in, arguing that Greek form is different than English form and that's true to an extent. But Paul must include the article (or not include it) for a reason.



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

When he simply writes "law" he appears to be referring to law in general—that's any knowledge of Good and evil, as if taken from the tree and written down in any old book. But when he writes "the law" he seems to be referring to the Law of Moses, or some other specific law.

When he writes "sin" he's probably referring to sin in general. But when he write's "the sin," I think he's reminding us of the root of sin, the sin in the Garden. And some argue that, with the article, he's even personalizing the sin in reference to the one who tempted us in the Garden—that is the devil. Likewise, when Paul writes "the righteousness," I think he's pointing to the root of all righteousness, Jesus who is our righteousness, the righteousness that we tried to take from the tree at the devils tempting. And that righteousness is also personal, "Our righteousness" isn't just an idea; "our righteousness" is Christ, according to Paul.ⁱⁱ That's a person.

Romans 6:18-19:
and, having been set free from [the] sin, have become slaves of [the] righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms, because of ~~your natural limitations~~[the weakness of your flesh].

Remember we talked about the weakness of the flesh a few weeks ago—it's not that it feels pleasure and pain, but that it only feels its own pleasure and its own pain. But if my body were a

member of another body, I would feel the pain and pleasure of all the members of that other body... I would participate in a higher consciousness.

Romans 6:19:

I am speaking in human terms, because of ~~your natural limitations~~ [the weakness of your flesh]. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to [the] impurity and to [the] lawlessness leading to [eis: into, unto] lawlessness,

Now that's a wild thought but he's said it already: law makes us lawless. Every parent knows that's true. Make a law and your kids will want to break that law, just to prove "I am me and not you!"ⁱⁱⁱ

Romans 6:19-23:

For just as you once presented your members as slaves to [the] impurity and to [the] lawlessness [into] more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to [the] righteousness leading to [eis: into] sanctification. ²⁰ For when you were slaves of [the] sin, you were free in regard to [the] righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time [did you have then] from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from [the] sin and have become slaves of God, ~~the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end,~~ [you have your fruit unto sanctification and the end,] eternal life. ²³ For the wages of [the] sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus...

That's where the eternal life is. It's in him, as if you were part of his body.

Romans 6:23:

For the wages of [the] sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord [our Master].

You may have forgotten this, but Lord literally means Master. So, if you call Jesus Lord, you call yourself "slave." And just to be clear "slave" means "slave," and not the more sanitized Hebrew version—Paul is writing to Romans. "Both sin and grace are defined as 'slavery' in the strictest sense of the word" writes Karl Barth. "Slavery defines the totality of our human existence: it defines it exactly because it is an existence from which we cannot possibly escape. Grace and sin are to one another as 'either' is to 'or.'"

So, I think Paul must be saying, "Your old man is a slave, and your new man is also a slave. So, whom would you like to be your master? To whom will you present yourself? What's your choice?"

And yet slaves don't choose their Master; the Master chooses the slave. So, if you choose "the righteousness" as your master, it must be "the righteousness" choosing you, choosing within you, and giving his choice to you. But if you claim to choose your master—you reject the notion that you are a slave, which is being a slave to a lie, which is the sin. A tad confusing, huh?

Well Paul still seems to be clear: “You’re a slave OR . . . a slave.” But then, as if to catch himself, and us, he adds, “But I’m speaking this way because of the weakness of your flesh”

Last week at “Chew the Fat” we read this verse and my friend Joseph, who watches in Arkansas, asked a tough question. “How do we reconcile what Paul says about slavery with all his talk of freedom in places like the book of Galatians?” I don’t think Joseph was saying this—but a lot of Christians say this—they often say this when they don’t understand why God would allow for so much suffering in this world or the next—they say: “Well God gave us free-will. Well yeah, I feel sorry for them, but you know, free-will. God is love but some can never be saved cause, ya’ know, free will.” Some people even say, “God is Love, so ya’ know, he would never violate your free will.”

When my daughter Elizabeth was little, she definitely had a will—a very strong will. I think she thought it was a free will. Susan and I used to say, that she’d grow up to either save the world or become the dictator of some third world country, a despot. Some nights, I think on about three occasions, when she was a toddler, she got herself so worked up that—just for the sake of protecting Susan and her brother Jon—I had to hold her down kicking and screaming until she literally just passed out. In the morning, I’d be totally strung out; exhausted from worrying all night about what she might say to the therapist when she was 32, but she’d walk into the kitchen beaming from ear to ear, give me a kiss, and say “Hi Daddy,” as if to thank me for saving her from herself the night before—strong will, but I’m not so sure about “free-will”

One day she asked, “Daddy, do killer whales live in lakes? I said, “No Honey. Killer whales don’t live in lakes.” She said, “Yes, they do.” I swallowed hard and said, “No they don’t.” She said “Yes, they do.” The argument escalated. You see, knowledge is power. And she was tempted to exercise power over me. And so, of course, she wanted more knowledge. The argument escalated, until she finally yelled, “I’m calling Poppy”—Poppy was my Dad, who was also a pastor. She said, “Well I’m calling Poppy; he’s been a pastor longer than you!”

So, she called. Thank God, my Dad didn’t back down, when she doubled down: “No honey” he said, “Killer whales don’t live in lakes.” And Elizabeth had a melt-down. I mean it’s really a good thing that she didn’t have access to nuclear weapons, for the world would’ve come to an end back in 1993. She must have been about four.

One day when she was about five, she felt like Susan and I had violated her free-will just one to many times and all negotiations had broken down. At one point she just started screaming, “I don’t want a Mommy; I don’t want a Daddy; I don’t need a Mommy and I don’t need a Daddy!” I looked down at her, glaring at me with those big eyes and tear-stained cheeks and my heart just broke for her. I thought “Love would never violate free will.” And so, once more, she screamed: “I don’t want a Daddy.” And I said “OK.” I drove her to the bus station. Dropped her off; I never talked to her again. We often wonder what became of Elizabeth, but you know “free-will.”



Actually, I didn’t do that. And actually, I don’t think I violated her free-will, because I’m not convinced—especially at that point—that she actually had any. I think St. Paul would say, “Of course she didn’t; haven’t you read Romans?”

Whatever the case, I didn’t actually drive her to the bus station; However, I did say “ok” And then I stopped talking to her, I stopped looking her in the eye, I acted like she wasn’t even in the room and Susan did the same. Of course, I was more aware of her than ever, my heart burned for her more than ever; it burned for her as I watched her grow more miserable than ever; she thought she was free of me. And yet, she was in our house, I supplied all her needs, I loved her more than ever, but I let her think she was free of all of us and free of me. Sometimes I wonder if all of human history, all of my history and all of your history, is like that day back in 1995.

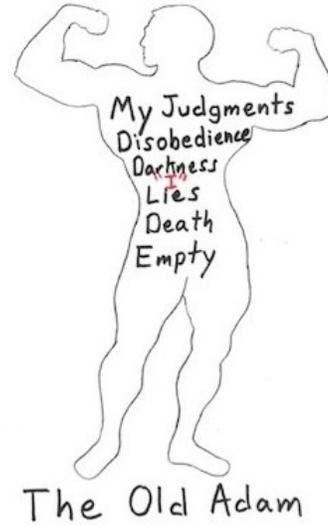
By the end of that day—you could call it the 6th day—Elizabeth was in complete and total agony. Although she was doing her best to act independent, happy, and free, I knew that she was in a prison—a prison that we have called “me.” She was an “I” trapped in a prison called “me.”

Many Scientists will now argue that none of us are actually free. Experiments by the famous neuroscientist Benjamin Libet seem to indicate that our subconscious selves—our physical bodies and psychic bodies—actually make decisions before we are aware that we’re making them. Which means “free choice” is really just a game my brain plays to justify “me,” and “I” am actually a prisoner of that “me” and so not free.

See the “I” trapped in “Me?”—the old me, the Old Adam. “I” am not “me” and “I” can rarely, if ever, control “me.” And yet, “I” can be conscious of “me,” and that’s a mystery.

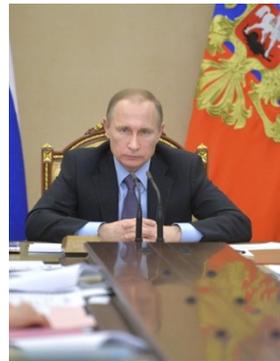
Well, whatever the case, by the end of that day, Elizabeth was not free. She was clearly a prisoner of her own “me.” At one point I mentioned that I was going to Walgreens for some reason or another. And Elizabeth asked to ride along. I mumbled “whatever.” We got in the car: just her, just me. I paused, before I turned the key. I looked at her; she looked at me. And then—no lie—it was like a volcanic eruption, as if her little ego could no longer contain the Spirit welling up within. She just threw herself across my lap, as she convulsed with tears, and cried out, “Oh Daddy, Daddy, I want a Daddy, and I want a Mommy and I love you Daddy and I love Mommy... I love you. I love you. I love you.” And suddenly, we were happy and free; I was a slave to her, and she was a slave to me; we were both slaves and both free. Elizabeth is now 32 and no one is as nice to me as she.^{iv}

The “Me” that I create



Pop Quiz:

Who’s free—the man on the left, Vladimir Putin, or the man on right, the man hanging on the tree? Right now, the entire world—and I mean the entire world—is utterly terrified of violating the will of Vladimir Putin. So, is he free? And what about the man on the tree? Doesn’t the entire world constantly violate the man on that tree? He’s the will of God—that man on that tree. So, is he free?



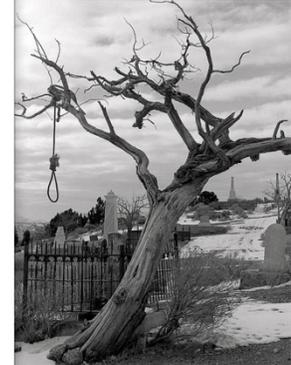
Who’s free—the Astronaut untethered and floating in empty space or my daughter dancing with my Dad and my Dad dancing with my daughter?





Who's free—the Chicken leg that's free of the chicken or the Chicken leg attached to the chicken?

Here's a tough one. Who's free—the fellows in pointy hoods on the left? Are they free or is it the children of slaves whom they would hang on this tree?



Who's free? Vladimir Putin, or the man on the tree?

Video clip: *Little Superheros – Spiderman and Superman Outdoor Adventure*
New Sky Kids (2015, April 3, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNFse0z5al0>)

Two five-year-old boys run around the yard dressed in Superman and Spiderman outfits, playing superheroes.

Are these boys free? Are they free? That's a complicated question, isn't it? Their kind of a mix of slave and free. All little children are like slaves: You wouldn't want to entrust those boys with a nuclear arsenal; it's good that they're not entirely free. They're not free and yet they are free—far more free than Vladimir Putin—as long as they live in their Father's world, their Mother's back yard. As long as they're conscious of someone that is conscious of them—someone who loves them. Isn't that what distinguishes a super-hero from a super-villain? Super-villains are only conscious of themselves—they are an "I" trapped in a "me," but Superman is willing to sacrifice his will, and his "me," for that of another. In other words, he wills to love, for he has been loved. Remember, faith in love is every Superhero's superpower, for Love is writing the story, the super story, the Gospel. Love can raise the dead.

Marissa Kruger sent me this great little song by Guy Clark titled, “The Cape.” It’s about an eight-year-old boy who makes a cape and jumps off the garage roof, hoping to fly, but instead landing hard on the ground. But for eighty years he keeps jumping, jumping till the day he dies. And Guy Clark sings, “He did not know he could not fly, and so he did... Well, he’s one of those who knows that life is just a leap of faith... spread your arms, [take a] breath, and always trust your cape.”^v

Your cape is faith in Love, and Love is writing the story. Love can raise the dead. A few weeks ago, we noted that every baby is born conscious only of itself, for every baby considers Mom to be an extension of itself, and so every baby is alone by definition and it’s not good for the Adam to be alone. And so, every good mom and every good dad, wants their baby to become conscious of self, as separate from other selves, which implies knowledge of knowledge of the good, which is a communion of selves, and knowledge of the evil—which is separation, isolation, loneliness, and death.

We want our babies to become self-conscious, and then, other-conscious, so that they might choose to surrender their consciousness to another consciousness and gain a higher consciousness

- so that they might make space for others in a world larger than their own.
- so that they might lose their psyche and find it in another.
- so that they might love as they have been loved.
- so they might return home and say “thanks for life Mom and Dad.”
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I think the Bible calls that freedom.

At Chew the Fat, my friend, Joseph gave the best answer to his own question. He said, “You know Galatians 4 is what helps me the most.

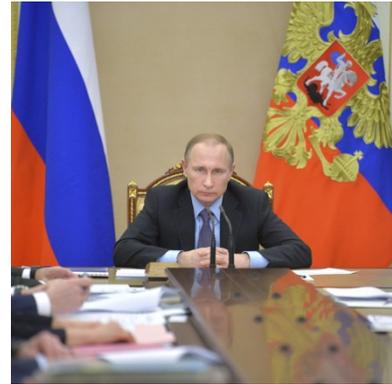
In Galatians 4, Paul writes “I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything,² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles (or spirits) of the world.⁴ But when the fullness of time had come [that’s the end of the sixth day, a Friday when it is finished], God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

This is a mystery and a miracle: but when you’re free, love isn’t imposed from the outside as a law. (Actually, that’s how the tupos, the old man, grows according to Paul—the law reveals what I should be but am not; with the law I build my empty self. The law is the imprint of Love upon the clay that I think is me.) But when you’re free, Love isn’t imposed from the outside as a law; Love wells up from the inside like a fountain and begins to fill the empty typos with life, like blood fills every member of a body—a powerful body, a happy body, a super-body.^{vi} When that happens, I stop trying to be me, for me is who I am—the incarnation of Love.

I cry “Abba Father,” not because I should, but because that is who I am. I love, not to justify myself, but because I’ve been Justified. I’m free; I’m free of “me” (the old “me”) and “me” (the new “me”) is free to be who it is that I am.^{vii} “The opposite of freedom” writes Soren Kierkegaard, “is... guilt.” Guilt is knowledge of what I should be but cannot make myself. But freedom is surrender to my maker who makes me himself, the true self, the true self that is really “me.”

When I am bound and determined to rule the world, I’m just miserable. But when I remember that I’m not called to exalt myself, but humble myself, called not to be first, but called to be last and least; when I remember I’m called to serve, I lose myself and find myself kind of happy.

So, anyway, is this man free? You know if freedom is “free will,”—that is freedom to get what you will. If freedom is a will unencumbered or limited by other wills, then, literally, no one in this entire world is as free as Vladimir Putin, right now. His will is literally holding every other will, in this world, hostage to itself. And yet Paul—who knows a thing or two about guys like this, for he was actually a guy like this Paul would say, Vladimir is not free, for Vladimir is trapped in his “me,” and miserable as hell.



What is it that Vladimir Putin wants? Isn’t it obvious? He wants to make himself Superman, but he doesn’t yet know who superman is, and that Superman must make Vladimir himself. The Superman is the incarnation of Love. A spoiled child is often a very capable child, but a rather unloved child. A spoiled child gets what he thinks he wants, but can no longer want what he gets, for what every child actually wants is Love. The spoiled child tries to take Love and control Love, but all the more just keeps crucifying Love.

It is the Liar in the garden that said, “Take Love, and you can make yourself in the image of Love, the incarnation of Love—the, Christ.” But when we listen to the lie, we don’t make the Christ, but the imitation Christ, the anti-Christ; not Jesus, but Me-sus. Someone said, “The chief punishment of the liar is not that he is no longer believed, but that he can no longer believe.” The liar is a will that is free of every other will, including the Will of God, who is the Truth. You might call that free will, but that will is entirely alone and utterly insane and if that’s not hell, nothing is.

So, what is Vladimir Putin’s offramp? Everyone seems to be asking that question: What is his offramp? Well, his offramp is exactly the same as your offramp. It’s just the same as Old Rabbi Saul’s offramp. This is your offramp.



Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.

Is that a slave that's hanging on this tree or is that man on the tree the one that is truly free? Well, he is a slave. He's my slave and your slave and Vladimir Putin's slave. He said, "...whoever would be first among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be serve but to serve and give his life for many."^{viii}

He's slave of all, because he's slave to God, and God is Love. He said, "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does the son does likewise."^{ix} He's slave to God and Slave of All, and yet he's free of all for as he said, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again."^x So, he freely chooses to lay it down, for he must see that his Father freely chooses to lay himself down, and doing what his father does, makes him happy.

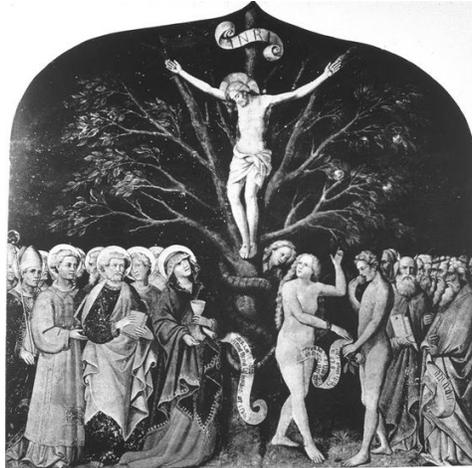
He even said, "My food—the thing that energizes me—is to do the will of my Father."^{xi} No man is a greater slave than he and no man has ever been so free.

- He's not trying to be a superman; this is the Superman.
- He's not trying to save himself; he is the savior.
- He's not trying to justify himself; he is the justification.
- He's not trying to be righteous; he is the righteousness of God your Father.

And slave, He is your Master. Some people say that Christianity doesn't address the issue of Slavery. And yet, this is the Master whom we profess to follow. Perhaps the world can't see him, for we don't see him. We're all trying to be some "Christian" version of Vladimir Putin.

You are a slave. He is your Master. He is the righteousness of God. Romans 6:19 “So now present your members as slaves to [the] righteousness leading to [eis: into, unto] sanctification” ... that’s “holiness.”

Holiness is a way of being that transcends the realities of space and time and transcends the limitations of our flesh. It’s losing your psyche and finding it in the Psyche of God. It’s the humble exalted and the exalted humbled, the first last and last first, the slaves free and all the free freely choosing to be slaves—that’s the logic, the logos, of Love.

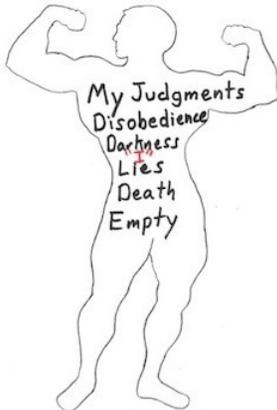


"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

He’s your Master and he’s made himself your slave. He’s the heart of your Father. And he’s giving himself to you. And I know what you’re thinking: “If I live like him, I could die like him.” Exactly. That’s your offramp and your onramp. “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will surely be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Paul just told us that. Jesus tells us “Pick up your cross and follow.”

The Tipos (the “type”)

The “Me” that I create

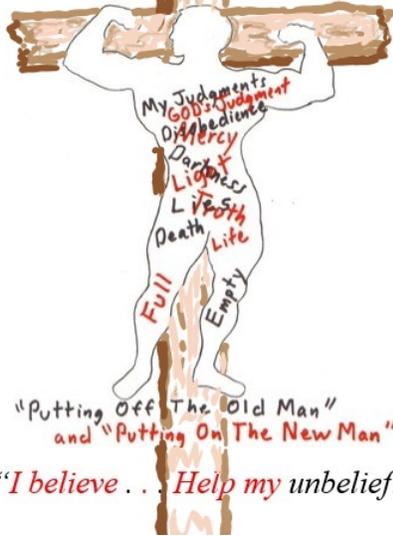


The Old Adam

Faith in Me-sus

THE HOT MESS

Me being created in Space and Time

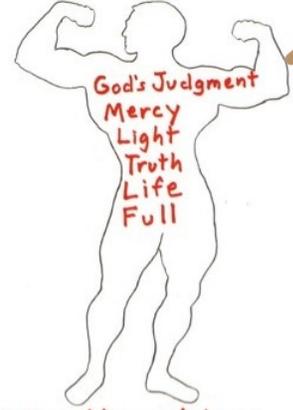


“Putting Off The Old Man”
and “Putting On The New Man”

“I believe . . . Help my unbelief!”

“The One Being About to Be”

The “Me” that GOD creates



The New Adam

Faith of Jesus

That’s your offramp, your onramp, and that’s your superpower: faith in Love. Love is writing the Story, and it’s Love that raises us from the Dead. Love is our Father, and this is our Father’s World, even if the rulers of this world tell you different. You may think, “That thought is nice; Love is nice. But it will accomplish nothing in a place like Kiev, Chechnya, Damascus, or Jerusalem.” Well, you might think twice before advancing that argument.

Jesus once informed his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed. And Peter advanced that argument saying, “This shall never be.” And Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get behind me Satan...”^{xii} “Oh, it might be the Devil, or it might be the Lord, but you’re gonna’ have to serve somebody.”

Me-sus or Jesus. Me-sus will turn you into a Miserable Despot. I doubt that the devil gives a rat’s ass about who wins this war as long as he can turn all of us into miserable little despots, and maybe we already are. Faith in me-sus is bondage to the Devil. But the Faith of Jesus will set you free.

- It will turn you into a happy slave...
- It will turn you into the Superman...
- It will turn you into the Incarnation of Love...
- And Love is writing the story.^{xiii}—the whole story.

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love does not fail” wrote Paul. “And love has been poured has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”^{xiv} There is no fire power greater than Love. Love will change the world. And Love is not alone; Love is three persons and one substance; Love is Happy.

Several years ago, at a National Youth Workers Convention, I got to hear the renowned Harvard Psychologist Dr. Robert Coles talk about Ruby. And I think Ruby changed my world. Ruby Bridges was a descendent of slaves, and so some of her relatives must've actually been hung on the hanging tree, with Jesus. He said, "whatever you do to the least of these, in Louisiana, in Russia, in the Ukraine, whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me."

In 1960, a federal judge ordered the forced desegregation of the New Orleans School District. So, every day six-year-old Ruby Bridges was forced to attend The William Frank Elementary School alone... because all the other students were white, and none of their parents would allow any of their children to sit next to a black girl, like Ruby. Because the New Orleans police refused to protect Ruby, the federal judge ordered federal marshals to escort Ruby to and from school every day.

Every day they would escort Ruby past a mob of angry white people yelling, "We're gonna kill you nigger." A federal judge called on Dr. Coles to fly to New Orleans and meet with Ruby on a regular basis. At the convention, Dr. Coles told us how, at the time, he was just utterly mystified by six-year-old Ruby, for she seemed so happy and so free.



One day, Ruby's teacher told Dr. Coles that she had observed something strange and rather troubling, just that morning. "As usual the four federal marshals were walking Ruby through the crowd," she said—some holding crosses, one woman holding a coffin with a little black doll inside, all of them yelling at Ruby. "As usual the marshals were walking Ruby through the crowd, and across the street," said Ruby's teacher, "but this morning Ruby stopped and began talking. The federal marshals had tried to get Ruby moving, but she wouldn't budge. She just stood there looking at the crowd and talking," said her teacher. "Then, all at once, she just finished and walked on into the school."

Later in the day, Dr. Coles sat Ruby down and questioned her about the incident, he said, "Ruby why were you talking to those people this morning?" She looked surprised and said, "I wasn't." Dr. Coles replied, "Ruby your teacher saw you from the window. You stopped and she saw you talking." Ruby thought a moment and then said, "I wasn't talking to them, I was praying." She explained as if she thought he would know: "Every morning before I start my walk, and every afternoon, I say the same prayer. This morning I forgot to say my prayer, but when I saw those people, I remembered, and so I stopped and said my prayer. I pray for those people."

Confused, Dr. Coles said, "Ruby, you pray for those people?" She said, "Yes." He said, "You pray for the people in that angry crowd that say such mean things about you? You pray for them?" Ruby looked at the eminent Dr. Coles, with this confused expression on her face and

said, “Well, don’t you think they need prayin’ for?” I suppose that doesn’t occur to us, because we’re all trying to be first, and don’t actually believe that it’s the last and the least, the poor and the meek, that are blessed (*makarios*). That means “happy.”

I suppose it’s because we’re actually jealous of sinners, miserable despots, and guys like Vladimir Putin and can’t believe that guys like Jesus, and girls like Ruby, are free. “Don’t you think they need some praying for?” asked Ruby. “Don’t you think we need some praying for?” asks me. And “Don’t we think Vladimir Putin needs some praying for too?” Maybe we should do some prayin’ for Vladimir, Volodymyr, and each of us. I’ll start and if you can, make my words your words. Then in the silence offer your own words. And then, if you feel lead, offer those words out loud.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, we have thought and even taught that you are a miserable despot, that you would not only surround a city, starve the people and bomb them but that you would torture them endlessly forever and ever and ever. Father, you discipline your children, but you are not a miserable despot. In fact, you are the happy slave who longs to share his joy with the children whom he loves absolutely. And so, Lord God, we repent. We change our minds about you. And God, with just a mustard seed of faith right now, each of us says that we’d kind of like to be like you. So, we receive the discipline, Father, that you would have for each one of us.

And Father, we pray for Vladimir Putin. Oh God, I pray that you would give him the offramp. By that I mean that you would manifest your glory to Vladimir Putin God, that’s what you did for old Rabbi Saul—breathing threats and murder and dragging your people off to death. You were his offramp and his onramp. And so, Lord God, I pray for Vladimir Putin that you’d just burn the Hell out of him and that you would reveal your Love within him, and that it would all be to your glory. And Lord God, we pray for Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Lord, I pray that you would guard him from becoming Vladimir. I pray that you would guard him from self-righteous anger and resentment and that you would reveal more and more of yourself to Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Thank you, Lord God, for the courage in Volodymyr. Thank you for the love he has for his people and guard him from the evil one, who wants to turn him into a miserable despot. Father, we pray for the people of Ukraine. I pray Lord God that they would not return evil for evil, and so become what they now hate—miserable despots. I pray that they could return good for evil, and so become your presence, and so heap your burning coals on the head of the enemy—your burning love and mercy (Romans 12:17-21). I pray for the people of Russia. I pray that they would not idolize Vladimir Putin, and so become miserable despots.

Father, I pray for us cause we’re afraid, which means that we’ve forgotten that this is our Father’s World. And so, we’ve stopped running around the yard; we’ve lost our capes, become miserable despots, and put our faith in miserable despots. Remind us that to lose our life is to find it in you. Remind us that you are writing the Story and you raise the dead. Remind us that it was a happy slave who spoke creation into existence and it’s a happy slave that now stands on the throne of God.

Jesus, you are our Master, and we are your slaves, for you have made yourself a slave to us so that we would all be free, so that we would all be happy, so that we could return home and say “thank you Dad, for life; our life.” Father, we thank you for the fruit; Paul talks about the fruit. Thank you for the fruit that you are growing on us—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. We thank you that you turn us into your tree, a tree of life with fruit that is for the healing of the nations.

Communion

When the fulness of time had come (the sixth day of creation), Father, Son and Holy Spirit took bread and broke it saying, “this is my body given to you.” Take and eat and do it in remembrance of me. And in the same manner 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 righteousness of God. So, let me ask you a question, would you like to see this world change; would you like to see it be changed? If you answered yes, I doubt that was simply you that answered. It was faith (the promised seed) within you that answered. With that faith, present yourself to the righteousness of God. And the righteousness of God will make you himself. And through you he will change the world. Like he did through Ruby Bridges, like he did through Rabbi Saul, like he does through his body in Ukraine, in Russia, and even Denver.

You are the body of the Superman. You come to this table as a miserable despot. He accepts you as you are, but you don't leave as you are. You leave this table as the body of the Superman, rising from the dead. That's who you are. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Benediction

So, do you want a daddy? Well, this is the good news, you've got one and he's good, and this is his world and you have forgotten that. This is his world, and you actually haven't even seen his world. It's all around you but we're trapped inside of “me,” just preparing to be born. So, this week, as you watch CNN or Fox News or MSNBC or whatever news you watch, and you find yourself getting a little bit miserable, feeling like:

- I don't know what to do
- I don't know what Volodymyr should do
- I don't know what the US should do
- I don't know what NATO should do

Of course, you don't know what to do, that's by design. Just remember you're not the ruler of the world. When I try to make myself the ruler of the world, I become a miserable despot. When I sit there thinking that I need to be great, well I just get miserable. But when I remember this is my Father's world and he's good, and he's called me to be a servant, even a slave, suddenly I'm free, I'm happy, and I'm me. So, in Jesus' name, believe the Gospel, Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ I realize this may raise questions with some, but I hope all would investigate the Greek, using Bible software, inter-linear translations, Young's Literal Translation, Karl Barth's translation, David Bentley Hart's recent translation, and any other tools available. These works, along with my two years of language training in Biblical Greek from Fuller Seminary, are what I use in creating the sections in brackets. To explain this in detail becomes simply too cumbersome for sermons.

ⁱⁱ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord." – 1 Corinthians 1:28-31 RSV

ⁱⁱⁱ My very first memory is my Mom saying to me "*Peter, do not pull on the wallpaper above your bed.*" I remember lying there in bed staring at the tear in the wallpaper above my bed, unable to think about anything other than tearing the wallpaper from the drywall above my bed—and so I did.

^{iv} Of course, we had many other days like that day back in 1993, but she is definitely not a miserable despot.

^v The Cape. As sung by Guy Clark

Eight years old with a floursack cape
Tied all around his neck
He climbed up on the garage
Figurin' what the heck
He screwed his courage up so tight
The whole thing came unwound
He got a runnin' start and bless his heart
He headed for the ground
He's one of those who knows that life
Is just a leap of faith
Spread your arms and hold your breath
Always trust your cape
All grown up with a floursack cape
Tied around his dreams
He was full of spit and vinegar
He was bustin' at the seams
He licked his finger and he checked the wind
It was gonna be do or die
He wasn't scared of nothin' boys
And he was pretty sure he could fly
He's one of those who knows that life
Is just a leap of faith
Spread your arms and hold your breath
Always trust your cape
Old and grey with a floursack cape
Tied all around his head
He's still jumpin' off the garage
Will be till he's dead
All these years the people said
He's actin' like a kid
He did not know he could not fly
So he did
He's one of those who knows that life
Is just a leap of faith
Spread your arms and hold your breath
Always trust your cape

^{vi} Living out of the center shapes and forms a liberated Christian. Albert Camus once said, "The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very act of existence becomes an act of rebellion." There is nothing more maddening to the mob than a free person.

- Brennan Manning, *Lion and Lamb - The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*, p. 108.

^{vii} Freedom is a being's power to flourish as a what it naturally is, to become ever more fully what it is. The freedom of an oak seed is its uninterrupted growth into an oak tree. The freedom of a rational spirit is its consummation in union with God. Freedom is never then the mere "negative liberty" of indeterminate openness to everything; if rational liberty consisted in simple indeterminacy of the will, then no fruitful distinction could be made between personal agency and pure impersonal impulse of pure chance. And this classical and Christian understanding of freedom requires a belief not only in the reality of created natures, which must flourish to be free, but also in the transcendent Good toward which rational natures are necessarily oriented. - David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved* pp. 172-173

^{viii} Mark 10:43-45

^{ix} John 5:19

^x John 10:18

^{xi} John 4:34

^{xii} Matthew 16:23

^{xiii} Love in Flesh is the righteousness—the Justice—of God. "Righteousness" (*dikaioσύνη*) is also translated "Justice." Justice is accomplished by making Adam in the image of God. Endless torment cannot be the Justice of God, for the Justice of God is making Adam (humanity) in his own image—and he is Righteous; he is Just.

^{xiv} 1 Corinthians 13:7-8, Romans 5:5