

“Divine Love”

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Texts: Jer.29:10-14; Gen. 3:14-24; Galatians 5:6

Third Sunday in Advent: Love

What do our exile from Eden, the flood, the election of Joseph, the deliverance of West Africans from bondage to paganism (tribal religions), idolatry, and worldwide oppression have in common with the Advent of the Savior of the world? They are all expressions of divine love. There is a reason why there is pain and suffering in the world and we acknowledge that they issue from the enmity between God and Satan—a war that Satan provoked by injecting sin and rebellion into God’s perfect creation. It almost doesn’t matter what instigated Satan’s attack. Perhaps Satan’s desire to hurt and harm God is explanation enough. But what he didn’t get from his attack is a pass; what he got was enmity. Warfare. And it won’t be over until he goes down in complete and utter defeat. Texans have a wonderful public sign, related to littering, which reads “Don’t mess with Texas!” For Satan the message could be customized: “Don’t mess with God.” It will not end well. So we shall visit these visitations of God as they expressions of divine love that they truly are this morning.

We will begin with a passage from the first gospel message recorded in the Bible:

“Because thou hast done this, cursed art thou above all livestock and above all beast of the field; on thy belly thou shalt go and dust thou shalt eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:14-15)

Those are the opening lines. It may surprise you to remember these words are directed at Satan, the serpent, even the Prince of Darkness, who is part of that “original” congregation in God’s open air service—Adam and Eve being the other two. However, those two comprised the entire human race at the time—so the congregation was small, local and global all at once! The Lord God Jehovah is the preacher and his words combine a judgment, an indictment and a declaration of war *all as a declaration of war* on Satan who, seeking to hurt and harm God out of vengeful rage *by targeting us*, had tempted Eve and brought about the fall—Satan had injected sin into God’s perfect creation. He did not get a pass! What he got was **enmity**—almost immediately. He had provoked the Almighty and God’s wrath was declared on him for doing what he did. Let us be very clear. ***This is God’s war.*** Satan is put on notice and, again, informed that it will not end well for either him or for any of those caught up in his rebellion. A declaration of war is the loving Father’s response to a wounded creation, and he does so on behalf of his loved ones (us!) who have been caught up in and made accomplices to this diabolical scheme. This gospel message is a mercy us-ward. It is “a future and a hope” such as we discover in Jeremiah 29:11: **For I know the plans that I [a]¹have for you, ’declares the Lord, ‘plans for [b]prosperity and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.**

The first gospel sermon, a judgment, a curse and a declaration of war on Satan . . . also a declaration of love, hope, redemption (summed up in salvation) for us as preached by Lord God Jehovah.

¹Footnotes

- a. Jeremiah 29:11 Lit *am planning*
- b. Jeremiah 29:11 Or *salvation*

The gospel promise precedes the declaration of consequences for us: pain in childbirth, subordination to her husband in matters spiritual—her desire to rule over him will be put in check. And for the man, *pain as well*: the ground that he was created to tend will be cursed because **he hearkened to the voice of his wife and have eaten of the tree which I commanded, “You shall not eat of it.”**

With regard to the cursing of the ground, to be very clear, it reads: **in pain shall you eat of it all the days of your life** (it won’t be easy!), **thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you** (your fruitful harvests will be complicated by this judgment of interference! Food will be an issue.) **By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground: for from dust ye came, unto dust ye shall return.** (vv.16-19) This brings the state of man very low, low enough for snakes to glide on. *Notice the role of “dust” in both judgments.* What is dust? It is created matter, the stuff from which we were formed by God **into which he breathed the breath of life.** Dust is the result of pulverization, of wasting and faulting, of grinding and erosion, the clash of mountains and rock on rock erosion—and some is even formed as particulate from the blowing of the wind, sand blasting forth sand, setting in heaps after eruptions and explosions. Dust is the aftermath of much activity. It’s more than dust bunnies under a bed! And, of course, the woman is cursed with **pain in childbirth. It reminds us we are human, fragile and vulnerable.** Pain and suffering act as if they are negative sanctions in part—they express the costliness of rebellion; they remind us that things were better once . . . and will be better again . . . a lingering scent of paradise lost . . . the aroma of paradise yet to come.

But note this: we endure pain and suffering because of God’s great love for us—real love engages us in consequences.

Further, we are “collateral damage” in this war between God and Satan. We are parties to another’s war. The enemy attacked and took us captive; he enslaved us under sin and the power of darkness. God’s love is such that he fights to get us back. Indeed, God’s love is directing the course of salvation history, salvation history brackets world history and human history both; salvation is what ultimately matters. God will defeat Satan, liberate, redeem and reduce all his people! The rest is in the footnotes.

Facing the fall-out, engaging in warfare are divine judgments.

Yet Gen. 3:20 records the astonishing human response to “this judgment,” instead of repining God’s judgment, or blaming the serpent, or accusing his wife, Adam lovingly chooses to *bless* her: **The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living** (the Hebrew word means “life-giver”—a glorious title). We note that this name was given prior to her having had any children—it points forward!

Adam blesses Eve—that signifies that things are in proper order: *husbands are to be blessing their wives.* It makes the provision of clothing (another divine institution?!) for the pair by God seems like a benediction on what has gone on before: **God made clothing of skins** (remember that they were on a plant diet at this time!) and covered their literal nakedness—and their figurative nakedness, guilt and shame, as well. As it is written **love covers a multitude of sins.**

Death is a mercy—it prevents our eternal damnation from the start! But the kindness of God, his providential love extends even further: to prevent his special creation from living forever as fallen creatures in a fallen world, God cut Adam and Eve off from **the tree of life** and **sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.** (vv. 22-23) This

suggests that the dust from which Adam was originally taken was not Edenic—it was earthly, and that earthiness, the created world, would be the setting from which mankind would be redeemed by the **promised seed of Eve** (“the woman” just then) who would assume mere dust to become one of us!

God’s providential love is demonstrated throughout this passage in three ways: yes, even in 1. his angry rebuke of Satan. Love for mankind, providential and proactive, motivates God. 2. to preach the gospel as well as 3. to declare war (*establishing enmity*). The warfare commences very soon after the act of transgression. ***And the war is between God and Satan, not man and the serpent.***

For those in the know, this is the similar back story to Job—there’s a contest in heaven. Job is oblivious to it! And it is the faithfulness of Job that defeats, or humiliates Satan: Job declares of God, **Though He slay me, yet will I praise him.** This is a head shot to Satan (Gen. 3:15), he would likely have to be carted off the playing field under concussion protocols!

Of course. Adam and Eve knew that the tempter would be punished, and they knew how the war would shake down. Spurgeon wrote, “Not for your sakes do I this, O fallen man and woman, but for my own name’s and honor’s sake, that it not be blasphemed amongst the fallen spirits, I undertake to repair the mischief which has been caused by the tempter. . . . the mercy given for God’s sake is always to our troubled apprehension more sure than any favor which could be promised to us for our own sake.

The divine sovereignty and glory afford us a stronger foundation of hope than merit, even if merit can be supposed to exist.” (Spurgeon, Christ’s Glorious Achievements, 2006 reprint, p.35) Our hope is in the Lord. (Psalm 37:9.)

This, friends, was all that Adam had for revelation *in the beginning*—his lone star, *this one sole word of hope!* And we are so blessed to have much, much more! For example consider the revelation of God’s plan to Jeremiah:

10 “For this is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans that I [a]²have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for [b]prosperity and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will let Myself be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.’

Now that is, an echo of the first sermon, a message from on high—where truth is sourced, in the mind of God. Revelation is heaven-sent and the truth that comes from heaven is qualitatively different from truth that comes from scientific study and research (a kind of figuring out and

²Footnotes

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reaching up based on human efforts). The “truth” arrived at in this manner is always tentative, always revisable—revelation truth is neither!

I must speak to the **with all your heart** bit briefly. Our seeking will be in vain if it is not wholehearted. And that cannot happen if our hearts lack in purity and holiness. You may recall Jesus cleansing the Temple. The merchandising that transpired there was a hindrance to worship . . . to prayer and communion with God. So Jesus had to purge the Temple of this blasphemous defilement *and he may need to do the same in your own heart before you can be wholehearted!* Therefore, God’s plan of warfare includes the triumph of Christ in you (**the hope of glory**) and he offers his overcoming power towards that end continually. You have a role to play in undoing the mischief of the Evil One. And doing that is yet another black eye.

Jeremiah receives a much more detailed revelation—dates, times and actual locations and parties involved. **I know the plans I have for you** applies to God’s restoration of Israel after discipline; but God also has a battle plan for the defeat and overthrow of His enemies—all of them.

- God has aimed the wrecking ball of resurrection at death—the death of death and hell’s destruction begins with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.
- He knows who they are that are born after the flesh, the seed of Satan, and He knows those He has appointed to be born again, born from above, the seed of Spirit and of Christ.
- This is God’s war to execute and He will bring the eventual defeat of Satan, the undoing of all his mischief from Eden forward.

The exit from Eden, the rescue from the flood, the turning of Jacob’s sons from sin and depravity, the enslavement of Joseph, the calling of prophets and the anointing of kings, all testify to His divine engagement on our behalf with the one who seeks to work us woe. His doom is sure. Your faith KO’s Satan, your obedience knocks him to the ground . . . or, out of the ring. He may get up and proceed to another ring and, hopefully, receive a further thrashing. He will go from defeat to defeat until he falls at last punch drunk to the ground. His doom is sure.

Now if we scroll down time, or up depending on your viewpoint, from Adam to Joseph, twenty-two, or twenty-three generations, and fourteen generations from Noah, we come to Joseph (circa 1709 BC), son of Jacob and Rachel,—the date is debated, as is it’s occurrence in the Egyptian dynasties (Hyskos is one³). Now, after Joseph had been sold into slavery (13 years

³ It has long ago been observed that certain features of the Joseph Story fit well in the 12 Dynasty. A survey of some of these might be helpful.[7]

For arguments along these lines and others, see Aling, L. Wood, Archer, and Battenfield 1972: 77-85: [Aling, C.F. 1981 Egypt and Bible History.; Archer, G.L. 1974 A Survey of Old Testament Introduction; Battenfield, J.R. 1972 “A Consideration of the Identity of the Pharaoh of Genesis 47.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15: 77-85.]

Supporters of a 12th Dynasty date for the Joseph Story begin their arguments with a strict literal acceptance of the Biblical chronology of the Exodus and Sojourn. 1 Kings 6:1 is seen as dating the Exodus to ca. 1446 BC, and Exodus 12:40 is seen as placing the entrance of Jacob and his family into an Egypt where Joseph holds high office under the reign of Sesostriis III, ca. 1876 BC. Joseph’s career as an Egyptian governmental official would thus begin under Sesostriis II and would continue into the reign of Sesostriis III. (*RIGHT: Sesostriis III*) Specific elements of the Joseph Story are normally cited in support of such a Middle Kingdom date.

This is the position held by Aling, Archer, L. Wood, and, with slight modifications, by Bimson. While a literal reading of 1 Kings 6:1 is the major Scriptural support for a 15th century Exodus, it is not the only

pass)—when he reunited with his brothers, twenty-two years have passed! But God is arranging a safety net for Jacob’s family—that is what the sibling rivalries were generating: a mean-spirited revenge, yes, a real hate crime and betrayal transformed by God into a dramatic rescue. He causes **all things to work together for good**⁴ to those who are called, as Joseph was! The dreams of Joseph recorded in his youth expressed that “call,” and divine purpose—of course, no one at the time actually knew what they meant.

You can be a Joseph. You can prepare a sanctuary situation. It may not be the call of those you shelter to do what you are called to do!

The warfare between God and Satan (the **enmity**)—***not between man and Satan!***—has now taken the form of worldwide famine (in the known world of the ancient near east)! Seven years of plenty followed by seven years of dearth (or want)—attributed to climate change by some historical climatologists. The result: theft, death and destruction by the adversary! That intervention, or rescue is what our Advent reading on Love is reflecting on: God sent Joseph **to preserve life** (through the institution of slavery(!) something we consider an unequivocal evil). However, God used slavery and revenge to save his people from death by starvation; then, and God would use slavery again to rescue his people from West Africa and the Ivory Coast when they were threatened with extermination by tribal warfare. Blacks sold *their own* into slavery, those who were “war captives”—that they lived to protest slavery at all might be considered a divine mercy (from God’s point of view). Many blacks came into the Christian faith as a result of deportation to slavery in Europe, in the America’s! Some slave merchants were also black, not all certainly; and some were Arabian and others were European and Asian⁵. John Newton was converted out of the devilish slave trade!

I suggest to you that slavery is the devil’s institution, that bondage and oppression are methods of death and destruction in his kingdom *and they aim at our damnation*. But God turns even these evils to good! Remember, he saved a whole nation through a slave (Joseph), a Syrian general through a servant girl, and we have Ruth and Esther to add into the mix. **HOWEVER** God’s preoccupation is with our salvation and not with our legal, or social status—not with our party affiliation. *He is at war with Satan and will not entertain any distractions*: freedom, and social justice are subordinate to salvation always.

Semitic peoples then, far from immune to slavery, apparently practiced enslaving their own. However they acted in defiance and disobedience to the laws of God! After their bondage in Egypt, God expected they would not enslave others *especially not their flesh and blood!* It must not escape our attention that during the Assyrian exile, and the Babylonian exile—Israelites were

one. See for example 1 Chronicles 6:33 ff., where a genealogy of a musician is presented. Between Moses and Solomon there are 19 generations. If a generation is taken to be ca. 25 years, simple multiplication yields 475 years between Solomon and the Exodus, a figure nearly identical with the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1. <https://christiananswers.net/q-abr/abr-a016.html>

⁴ Jacob’s lust problem (with Rachel) worked a world of harm amongst his sons—they were, excepting Joseph, given to sexual depravity and idolatry. Joseph led the way out of that.

⁵ Slave raiding was practiced among native populations in the America’s before the Spanish, French and English arrived! The Iroquois, Mohicans, Inca and Aztecs traded in slaves for centuries; it was part and parcel of warfare. It was a practice not that alien to the gulags and death camps of twentieth century infamy—especially when coupled with ethnic genocide and the slaughter of dissidents. Indentured servitude, a tamer form of slavery, driven by debt and greed, tended to shade into domestic captivity. My recent visit to Florida introduced me to slave raiding between the Spanish, French and English during the so-called Seminole wars (18th and 19th centuries which were brutal). Everyone was exploiting slave labor amidst perceived shortages of labor.

war captives and enslaved, and/or were removed from their lands forcibly. The time in Egypt appears to have been exceptional, the Hebrews went *voluntarily* down to Egypt and sojourned there—it was God’s provision because they would not have survived in Canaan had they tried to remain there. It was an unintentional benefit that doesn’t justify slavery at all but underscores God’s sovereign kind will towards us—despite social ills, despite injustice.

ALL this lends relevance to the cries of **“Let my people go . . . that they may worship me.”** (Exodus 4:21-23; Exodus 5:1-4; 7:16; 8:20, 25-28; 9:1-3, 13-16; 10:3-11, 24-28.) I have listed just eight reiterations Moses’ demands to Pharaoh. And exile lends other relevance to the plea’s to **Set the captives free**—phrase that occurs over twenty times in the Old and the New Testaments. Whether imprisoned, or oppressed, or stymied in urban ghettos, **Set the captives free** is a frequent and fervent cry of the oppressed.

While freedom in Christ is the ultimate liberation, there are many lesser plea’s that have attracted God’s compassionate attention throughout the span of human history! This is especially so when we silt in humanity’s captivity to sin, evil and to the powers of darkness—the direct effects of Satanic rule—which Christ came to overthrow on our behalf. Remember, in this light, Paul’s call to liberate the Gentiles!

Deliverance from human wickedness (the flood), deliverance from perversion, dysfunction and famine (Joseph), deliverance from paganism, idolatry and international oppression (kings and conquests) that resulted from God’s judgments on His own people for their rebellion and sins, our loving God has done all this so that we may prosper in our day. Increase our confidence in your redeeming power, and as your warfare with Satan continues above, around and in our midst, remind us of your path to victory and may we anticipate the day of victory in Jesus’ name.

Rescue us from greed . . . corruption . . . aggression, control and conquest *as you have ever done.*
Amen.