

“The Divine Lament”  
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Genesis 3:9 and Luke 19:41 have this in common, both record God approaching man, first in the garden with Adam and, secondly, much later in salvation history, Jesus approaching the city of Jerusalem. In both instances God’s in-gathering initiative is met with rejection, as in the rejection of a loving parent by a child in desperate want, a flailing neediness, The divine lament is our heavenly Father’s lament over us. Matthew 9:35-38 comes to mind:

**35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 36 Seeing the [a]people, He felt compassion for them, because they were [b]distressed and [c]dispirited like sheep [d]without a shepherd. 37 Then He \*said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.<sup>1</sup>”**

And yet another expression of that divine compassion and lament in Mark 6:

**Mark 6:34 When Jesus stepped ashore and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And He began to teach them many things.**

**Distressed, or harassed, dispirited. Or down-trodden/oppresed . . . .helpless sheep lacking a shepherd . . . . bitter fruit of rejection, rebellion, defiant disobedience!**

We all have broken hearts that are stony hard, or shattered to bits, and that spiritual condition issues in estrangement, alienation and separation within ourselves, between us and others and most profoundly between us and God. As a result we have strife, enmity, conflict and contention. We are at war with each other because of this state of things and that evokes from God the divine lament.

When we read God’s cry, **Adam, where are you?** In Genesis 3:9 we mustn’t surmise that God’s GPS is faulty. God knows Adam’s physical location! We might ponder such issues as lostness, helplessness, **distressed, or harassed, dispirited, or down-trodden/oppresed . . . .helpless sheep lacking a shepherd *being fearful, ashamed, naked, vulnerable and guilty***— for all of that *spiritual captivity is where we are*; is our situation when we are located far from home, far from the Father’s heart. . . . the bitter fruit of sin. And because we are in that far country, God’s heart yearns for us to return to Him, to come home. God’s love yearns for us to be reconciled and restored to Him! That love motivated God to send His Son on the rescue mission to earth to be the perfect sacrifice necessary to effect that reunion. So why did Adam and Eve run and hide from God? **I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid.** Adam was (as yet) ignorant of the full extent of the catastrophe which rejecting God’s love (God’s laws. protection and provision)—all of which were his and Eve’s while resident in the Garden. One has to wonder what if Adam had provided a fuller disclosure of his calamity—what if he had confessed, “I feel unclean, defiled . . . . lost, helpless, distressed and harassed, dispirited and disgraced, oppresed, shepherd-less, isolated and alienated from myself and my wife and you. I feel homeless and alone and spiritually dead. Heal me, Lord, else we are finished.” Why didn’t Adam so present himself? Because, as yet, he had no experience of the ramifications of sin. We have. We have spent centuries in sin’s captivity, under the dominion of Satan (in the world, the flesh and the devil’s control). And, by God’s grace, some of us have come to our senses and thrown ourselves on the mercy of God; we have heard the word of

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes

- a. Matthew 9:36 Lit *crowds*
- b. Matthew 9:36 Or *harassed*
- c. Matthew 9:36 Lit *thrown down*
- d. Matthew 9:36 Lit *not having*

salvation and we have received it by faith so as to attain peace, so as to be fully and freely reconciled with God. We have returned home to His gracious welcome.

Well, not quite. Between where we are and where we hope (and trust), that we someday shall surely be there lies some distance. Because the homecoming is to be a once for all event—we, with those who have gone before us, as well as those who are to come in hereafter, all of us have been enlisted as **God’s servants, laborers, His workers sent out into His harvest**. As we sing at this time of year, with poignancy, we have been enlisted in “bringing in the sheaves!” We are to spread the gospel, the word of salvation as Christ’s ambassadors of reconciliation. Paul lays this out for us in 2 Cor. 5:11-21; let’s walk through that together:

**11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord** (reverential awe, not slavish dread), **we persuade men** (we go on our way, winning men to Christ—our avowed duty), **but we are made manifest to God** (because the innermost recesses of our hearts have been laid bare in God’s sight—as we have appeared before Him! And as we shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ! We stand on our integrity as Christians.); **and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences** (your new standards of right and wrong, holy and unholy!). **12 We are not again commending ourselves to you** (which is unnecessary) **but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart** (Paul wishes to arm his friends/supporters against those who oppose him for whatever reason—an aside that is timed-out, his detractors being deceased). **13 For if we [a]are beside ourselves** (most likely the sneer of some erstwhile detractor—a similar thing was spoken of Jesus himself), **it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.** **14 For the love of Christ controls us** (that is, bears us onward as a steady, prevailing wind does for a sailing vessel), **having concluded this** (or, “Judging thusly), **that one died for all** (paying our debt, or our ransom *so that all might live through Him*), **therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again** (both actions are necessary, to cancel sin’s debt first and then to sustain us in that fact of our forgiveness by his sacrifice) **on their behalf.**

**16 Therefore from now on** (because we live not to ourselves, but as unto God—the self focus is replaced in our hearts) **we recognize no one [b]according to the flesh** (his outward circumstances, or accidents of wealth, rank, culture or knowledge—as some who claimed a personal relationship to Jesus might boast—persons such as his brothers and sisters, family and neighbors even. They might claim to speak for Jesus.); **even though we have known Christ [c]according to the flesh** (Presumably, prior to his conversion when he supposed that the Messiah would usher in a new, Davidic state/political kingdom that would cast off Rome and elevate the Jewish king), **yet now we know Him in this way no longer** (Now we present Jesus as the Savior of mankind!). **17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, [d]he is a new creature; the old things passed away** (All old principles and practices are included. Ellicot: (17) Therefore if any man be in Christ—to be in Christ, in St. Paul’s language, is for a man to be united with him by faith and by baptism (**Romans 6:3-4**), to claim personally what had been secured to him as a member of the race, the “sheep,” for whom Christ died. In such a case the man is born again (**Titus 3:5**)—there is a new creation; the man, as the result of that work, is a new creature. The old things of his life, Jewish expectations of a Jewish kingdom, chiliastic (end times) dreams, heathen philosophies, lower aims, earthly standards—these things, in idea at least, passed away from him at the time when he was united with Christ. We may trace an echo of words of Isaiah’s that may have floated in the Apostle’s memory: “Remember ye not the former things, neither consider *the things of old*. Behold I make *new* things” (**Isaiah 43:18-19**). The words in italics are in the LXX. the same as those which St. Paul uses here.); **behold, new things have come** (Benson on v. 17:”He has new life, namely, a spiritual and divine life; new spiritual senses, new faculties, new desires and designs, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, passions and appetites. His whole tenor of action and conversation is new, and he lives as if it were in a new world. God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, angels, men, sinners, saints, and the whole creation

— heaven, earth, and all therein, appear in a new light, and stand related to him in a new manner, since he was created anew in Christ Jesus.”).

**18 Now all *these things*** (new things of the new creation) **are from God, who** (in His great, gracious redeeming work of salvation!) **reconciled us to Himself through Christ** (brought us home, welcomed, enrobed, put sandals on our feet and rings on our fingers!) **and gave** (commissioned us to bring the word of salvation hope to all) **us the ministry of reconciliation** (our duty, our work, calling and mission), **19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself** (man had been in a state of alienation and enmity with God, had no love of God in himself—but those barriers were atoned for and man was now brought into concord, peace, reconciliation with God!—made new with hearts made whole), **not counting their trespasses against them, and [e]He has [f]committed to us the word of reconciliation** (with great amnesty, we declare with full pardon, that the cosmic war is over—and Christ has won. Though our emancipation is a fact, we must learn to walk in it as fully as we walked in sin beforehand).

**20 Therefore, we are** (peace) **ambassadors** (former prisoners of war even!) **for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us** (speaking for Christ, *as if He were speaking still*); **we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God** (Come home, find rest unto your souls, suffer to be loved again). **21 He made Him who knew no sin** (who was faultless, absolutely sinless—he overpowered sin by resistance while we suffered in sin’s grip) **to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness** (holy and acceptable in His sight as we share in His righteousness/partakers of His divine nature by faith infused and indwelling) **of God in Him (God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

Salvation is not so much about escaping punishment as it is about coming home, becoming righteous, new, being spiritually restored *better than ever before*<sup>2</sup>—God so loved the world that He made a way to righteousness, and holiness and that way is through faith in the Lord Jesus. **O that my people would heed Me. And walk in my ways.** Psalm 81:13. O that we would hear the voice of God and, instead of running away, or hiding, we would run hard and fast into His arms to be loved and to learn to love God, self and others once again. In a word, that would satisfy the very heart of God.

It turns His lamentation to sheer gladness, pure joy. Punishment for sin is not God’s first priority. Actually His greater purpose is calling us home. Will you come?

**Amen.**

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<sup>2</sup> Two things warrant further explanation: first, **the infused and indwelling** and following, **the better than ever before.** Taking the second first, “better than being innocent of innocence” (Adam’s first state) is the innocence that accompanies entire forgiveness. This is a new, and later work that one comes into having passed through having lost that primal