

Written Copy: Isaiah 45:4-7 “Who Does All These Things?”

21st Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 24

Sunday, October 22nd, 2023

Text: Isaiah 45:4-7

⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. ⁷ I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Exegetical Statement

The LORD has promised that His Chosen people would go into exile and be banished from their land for 70 years because of their repeated unfaithfulness in worshiping other gods. But now, looking 200 plus years into the future, the LORD through his prophet Isaiah not only promises His people they will one day return home, but names the world leader who will be his anointed means to make that happen. He names Cyrus, before he is even born, to be His means of rescue for His chosen people. The LORD Himself will raise Cyrus up, He will remove all the opposing powers and kings that would stand against him. He will remove the defensive barriers that surround the city, and because the religious leaders of Babylon believe Cyrus is their god's chosen ruler, they unlock the gates and let he and his army walk right in. The LORD God of Israel, the One and Only God that exists, who forms light and shapes darkness, who makes peace and creates calamity, He is the One who will equip this pagan ruler, who does not know or bow to Him, to prosper and ascend to power. And He will move Cyrus to declare they can go home, sending with them the gold and silver objects taken from the temple when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it, and moving him to fund the restoration of the temple from his own treasury. All this the LORD works for the good of His people, and so that all the world might know He is the One and Only God, that there is no other.

Focus Statement:

The LORD shows that He is in control of all things, elevating countries and leaders to power who will fulfill His will and plans even when they do not believe in Him. He allows evil things to occur and uses them so that all might turn to Him and know Him as the Redeeming God. He moved evil and unbelieving men to put His Only Son to a painful and horrible death so that all the world might be saved through Him. He works even in countries where Christianity is banned so that people still hear the Gospel and come to faith. And all that happens is part of what He declares must happen before Jesus returns to rule uncontestedly over all on the Last Day.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

As we look at the war ramping up in the Middle East, the tension between our country and China over Taiwan, Russia with the aid of North Korea attacking Ukraine, and even the political unrest at home, we can see God as having His hands tied since many of the players do not believe in Him.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Even when things look bleak, hold fast to the promise that our Savior is still in control ruling over all things. And He works all things for the good of those He has chosen, called to faith, and works to keep in faith unto life everlasting.

Subject Sentence: Our Savior Jesus Christ is in control of all things.

Introduction

Throughout in our lifetime it seems like there has always been trouble brewing somewhere in the world. But in this past year the outbreak of war and threat of war has become very evident and worries many of us in this country.

Headlining the news is the war that Israel has declared against the Palestinian based Hamas after they invaded and launched rocket attacks on Israel that killed 1,400. Israel responded with a counterattack of missiles into the Gaza Strip that has killed 3,700 there, plus many more injured on both sides. Hamas has continued to attack Israel firing more than 7,000 rockets and targeting the Israeli Capital of Tel Aviv early this morning. The Hezbollah located in Lebanon support the Hamas in Gaza, and they have launched attacks on Israel, who has countered with daily air strikes upon certain locations where they are based. The Hezbollah has promised that if Israel invades with ground troops, they will be fighting a war on two fronts: in Gaza to the west, and Lebanon to the north. In addition, Israel has also engaged in airstrikes within Syria, located to the northeast, targeting Hezbollah and other militant groups seeking to supply and support the Hamas. In the Israeli occupied West Bank, a contested territory sandwiched between Israel on the west, south, and north, and Jordan to the east, where both Jews and Palestinians live, clashes and fighting has broken out between the two, and Israel has conducted an air strike on mosque in that area this morning. Also of concern is Iran, who has backed the Hamas and Hezbollah militarily and has also indicated they may become more involved. In the interest of protecting Israel, our ally, the United States has sent military aid to Israel along with a Naval Battle group and Marines to be stationed in the area, ready to help Israel if need be.

Now I should be pointed out, that we do not want confuse Israel as a nation now, with Israel of the Old Testament. Old Testament Israel was promised Palestine as God's gracious gift, as long as they continued to believe in and worship the LORD God alone. When Jesus came 2,000 years ago, He proclaimed Himself to be the One True God in human flesh. As a nation, Israel from Jesus day through today has rejected Him as such. Since they do not believe in the Triune God as He has manifested Himself to be in Scripture, any Biblical claim that the current nation of Israel may have on Palestine is invalid.

I should also point out that what is going on in the Middle East is not necessarily what the Book of Revelation calls Armageddon, as many fundamentalist Christians might like to believe, who take a very literal reading of this highly symbolic book. Armageddon in Revelation is a symbolic picture of the spiritual warfare that the unbelieving world has been and will increasingly be waging against the Church. This war could have physical aspects to it. But it is a worldwide conflict that will cross all political borders.

And the Middle East is not the only place where war exists. Russia continues its invasion and war against the Ukraine, with President Biden promising continued aid for the Ukrainian counter offensive. The worry is that if Russia were to be successful in gaining control of the Ukraine, they might set their sights some of the other Baltic States that used to be under control of the Soviet Union, but now are NATO Allies. And not just them, but Russia has warned Poland that because of their involvement in supporting Ukraine, they could be next. And supporting Russia with weapons is another country our government is wary of: North Korea.

And then there is the tension between China and the U.S. over our support and presence around Taiwan, with the U.S. and China taking turns with Naval maneuvers and war games designed as a show of strength and deterrent against one another.

With all this going on, it can make you wonder, “Who’s in charge? Is anyone?” Now you and I know the answer, God is in charge. But as we look at all this, we see a battle raging between good and evil. And sometimes it appears that evil is winning. You have all heard this saying: “No God, no peace. Know God, know peace”. This is especially true when the God we know is the Triune God, when the God we know is the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord. While we want to believe that God is in control, the problem is that most of the world leaders involved in these conflicts do not believe in Him. We know our Lord works through believers, but question is how much control does He have over those who do not believe in Him. While we may confess that the LORD God will win out at the end, it seems that He is losing some of the battles along the way. If you have been wondering about these things, our Old Testament Lesson has some surprising things for you to consider.

Isaiah Describes All That God Will Do 200 yrs. in Future

In the Book of Isaiah, we hear God’s prophet speaking about events that have not happened yet in His lifetime. Isaiah accurately prophesies what will happen 200 plus years in the future. Isaiah warns the Southern Kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem that if they continue their worship of false gods, turning away from the One True God, the LORD will punish them by sending Babylon to destroy their city and take them into exile. Israel doesn’t listen and 200 years later that prophecy is fulfilled. Babylon totally destroys the city and the temple, kills many people, and takes the remnant back home into exile. There they remain for 70 years.

But Isaiah doesn’t just prophecy Israel’s destruction and exile. The LORD speaks through Isaiah to bring words of hope, He promises that He will forgive His wayward people and redeem them, restoring them back to their homeland in Palestine. And one of those passages of promised restoration is what we have before us today.

Isaiah 45:1 Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed

This is an amazing word of prophecy. It not only predicts 200 years into the future that the Empire of Babylon would be overthrown by the Empire of the Medes and Persians, but it names the king who would lead them successfully in this overthrow; King Cyrus. The LORD can name this king 200 years before he is even born because the LORD God is in complete control.

Just as the LORD raise up Babylon to be a world power to use them as His means to punish His unfaithful people, He raises up the Medo-Persian Empire to be His means to fulfill His prophetic word in Isaiah that Babylon too would get what was coming to them. The LORD is the One and Only God who installs Cyrus on the throne as king. The LORD is the power that subdued and removed all the other kings that tried to rise up against Cyrus. But when it came to His invasion of the city of Babylon, the LORD showed just how much He is in control of all things.

Babylon was one of the most fortified cities of that time. Hundreds of bronze gates were erected in the wall that surrounded Babylon. And a series of walls encompassed the city, the outermost was 11 feet thick. And if by chance you were able to punch through that you encountered another wall that was 21 feet thick. Of course, to even get at any of those walls you had to find a way across the moat that surrounded that. Even for the formidable army the Persians had, taking the city of Babylon seemed impossible. But not for the LORD.

The LORD put into the minds of the priests of the false god of Babylon that Cyrus was the leader chosen by their god. Along with this many of Babylon's military leaders feared Cyrus and his army. So, when Cyrus and his army approached the city, these priests opened up the gates for him and Cyrus and his army marched right in and took the city uncontested.

Isaiah 45:4-5 ⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me

Why did the LORD raise up this man to be King and by His hand give Babylon over to him? For the sake of His chosen people who were trapped in exile in Babylon. Because the LORD had not forgotten about His people or His promise to redeem them from exile. And who was Cyrus before the LORD did this in his life? He was not a believer! The LORD raised him up and equipped him for success when he was still yet a worshiper of false gods and idols. How could this be? Because there is only one God that rules over all things in the Universe, and that is the LORD God, our Triune LORD God. And He is more than capable of working His will in the hearts and minds of believers and unbelievers alike.

2 Chronicles 36:23 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.’”

This is an amazing testimony by a king who was not a worshiper of the One true God before hand. Cyrus not only signed the edict that allowed all God’s chosen people who wanted to return to return, but he sent back with them all the gold and silver ornaments and tools that the Babylonians had taken from the temple before they destroyed it. And he also paid for the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the temple out of his own treasury. The LORD was more than capable of accomplishing all He wanted to fulfill through Cyrus before he had faith, including bringing Him to know the One True God over all.

The LORD Works Through Evil to Accomplish His Good

What are we to take away from all of this?

Isaiah 45:7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Those things that we consider to be good, for our well-being, come from the hand of the LORD, the One and Only God who rules over all things. But what about the evil things? What about those things that create calamity? What about the wars and the suffering that continues to plague our world?

God is not the author of these evil things. They come from the hearts of sinful men living in a broken world, and from the hand of Satan who hates God’s creation of mankind and wants nothing more than to have as many people as he can gather join him in eternal hell. The devil is hard at work through the actions of sinful men to fight against God’s work through the Church to save mankind through the proclamation of the Gospel. And while we know that God wins the war. It certainly looks as if He loses some of the battles. But that is not the case. That is a lie from the mouth of Satan.

The LORD God is in complete control, so much so that He “creates” calamity, in that He allows it to happen and uses it to further His work and His will in the world. And there is no greater example of this than what happened to His Son.

Satan moved evil men, both Jews and Romans, to condemn Jesus of blasphemy against God, charging Him with falsely claiming to be God Himself, and moved the Romans to crucify Him for false charges of treason against Caesar. But through these evil and unbelieving men the LORD was fulfilling His purpose and plan for His Son, that He would suffer and die to save all mankind. Jesus’ suffering and death was not the end of His ministry on earth that was the aim of the Jewish religious leaders who were acting on behalf of the devil. Instead through it, Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for all who believe in Him. Jesus resurrection

proves that His death was not defeat, but the ultimate victory of God over sin, death, and the devil. And through the Gospel Message and the faith the Spirit creates, that victory is given to you, to me, and to all whom the Spirit works faith in their hearts. Through the continued proclamation of the Gospel, our God continues to win the battles and the war.

The God Who Controls All at Work Today

How should we see God at work in our world today? By remembering what happened to Jesus 40 days after His resurrection. He ascended to heaven where He has assumed the place of power ruling over all things at the side of the Father.

The Book of Revelation symbolically pictures this as Jesus sitting on the throne, being the only one who can open the scroll with seven seals. This scroll represents all that must happen between Jesus' ascension and His return on the Last Day. And since He is the only one who can open those seals, that means He is the only One who sets all things in motion. He works through the good things that come by His hand as well as the bad and evil things that come from the hand of sinful men and the devil. He works through believers and unbelievers, through good times and calamities, through wars and earthquakes and other disasters. In all this He is always at work to call those chosen by God to faith in Him. He especially uses suffering and calamity to turn unbelieving hearts away from trusting in themselves, other men, and other gods, and to turn to Him in faith by the Gospel.

Conclusion

In our Old Testament Lesson, we see the LORD at work far into the future to bring about salvation and a return home from exile for His chosen people. And He used the most unlikely of means, a pagan King who did what seemed impossible, conquering Babylon, all through the mighty power and work of the One and Only God of the Universe. In Jesus we saw that same God at work through evil and unbelieving men to bring about the greatest victory for all mankind, Jesus' victory for you and for me over sin, death, and the devil. And He is at work today, even in situations that seem impossible, in problems and events that seem like they are out of His control. Nothing is out of His control. He just works in ways that are beyond our understanding through what seems to be the most unlikely of means. And all that He does and allows to happen serves His purposes and His goal. And what is His goal? Not to save this broken and sinful world. Not to save the United States as a country. On the Last Day all things will all be burned up, all world powers will cease to exist, and all those who refused to believe and stood against Him will suffer apart from Him forever. His goal is to save all those who His Spirit will bring to faith out of this dying world and bring them to eternal life, where all these things we suffer now will never plague us again. His goal is to bring you to faith and keep you in faith unto eternal life to come. Amen.