

August 22, 2021

Isaiah 29:11-19

“What In The World Is God Doing?”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What In The World Is God Doing? It's hard enough to try to get into other people's heads in order to understand them and why they do what they do, so try and get a handle on how God views things and why he does what he does! One begins to realize that it might be far easier to single handedly push away a mountain to see what might be underneath! We have an expression, "It's like banging your head against a brick wall." Not a good idea! Still we do ask the question and are bid to look into Scripture for any scrap of information that might help us.

In the Scripture we are given tidbits of what God thinks and what he's up to. It may not be all of the details that we want, but at least the Lord confides to his children who he is and a general idea of where things are going. In the pages of the Bible we see how God has revealed himself in the past and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are left to apply those moments to our own lives. And lately, we have probably been asking that question a lot as our own society is crumbling right before our very eyes. **What In The World Is God Doing?**

In our Old Testament lesson for this morning, we have a glimpse of how God works. As I have said in the past and will continue to say, God works in strange ways because humanity has become estranged from him. Do you know what it means to be estranged? It means that humanity has lost its closeness and affection for God. We are alienated from him. We are hostile toward him. And even as Christian people there is a part of us that remains estranged from him despite the fact that he is pure love.

What is God doing when a society is melting down? What is God doing when the church appears to be nothing but a mess? What is God doing when he allows the enemies of his gospel of forgiveness in Jesus to grow stronger, to threaten, and to even abuse his people? There are many more questions that we could ask and it is always easier to ask than to answer!

We seem to be acquainted with the truth that things will increasingly get worse as we approach the coming of the Son of Man. That would certainly be a part of the answer. But we still don't always seem able to digest that as we ought, especially when the intensity of trouble increases in our own generation so that we begin to wonder how bad it's going to get. When things hit us personally we seem to want to know a little more detail and we want instant relief. We get relief and details in our Old Testament lesson. But will it satisfy our curiosity and help us in our desire for it to go away when it may linger for a long time?

Our Old Testament lesson for this morning is Isaiah 29:11-19. God is speaking to Jerusalem. The city was the dwelling of God and the place where he showed the tender mercy of his compassion in the temple and the sacrificial system that pointed to Jesus and the cross. God's people had become calloused to his gifts of forgiveness and salvation. In exchange for the true worship of the gospel of forgiveness the people were embracing themselves as the way to happiness. They had forgotten God so that now God would bring her low so that they would "mumble from the dust," as it says. He will lay siege to them. He will encamp against them. He will encircle them as to entrap. And he did just that! I can only imagine that many in Jerusalem were wondering **What In The World Is God Doing?**

The Lord can still work in this way when it comes to his people and nations. He can bring people to a deep sleep so that they are oblivious. He can seal their eyes so they can no longer see. He can cover heads so that they do not know. Isaiah writes in verses 11-12, “And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, ‘Read this,’ he says, ‘I cannot, for it is sealed.’ And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, ‘Read this,’ he says, ‘I cannot read.’”

You would think that those who dwelt in Jerusalem would have been mostly believers. Many were sadly in unbelief. Not only were they living in unbelief but they were unmoved by God’s chastisement so that God left them in unbelief. Consequently, things in life spiraled downward. This is what stubborn unbelief does. But in this strange way the Lord continues to work so that others will feel the heat of the situation, and see the wrath of God so that when they see how far others are away from the Lord and how lonely it is to not have his affection and how they themselves have drifted, they will begin to long for the Lord and his forgiveness and help. He “astounds ... with wonder upon wonder so that the wisdom of the wise will perish and the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”

When this happens there are others who are truly humbled. Perhaps the things that are happening all around us are for our personal humbling. I mean when you stop and think about it there is a tremendous feeling of vulnerability and helplessness that is engulfing us as we see the wonder upon wonder of the Lord, where the wisdom of the wise is perishing and the intelligence is vanishing. God allows foolishness and vanity so that true humility and wisdom may come to some. What if all that we see around us is nothing but the Lord doing his work of salvation for us who have taken everything for granted for so long? What if we are being stirred by strife to rely all the more on the Lord so that he may save us and even motivate us for the salvation of future generations? What if he is preparing us for his return in our very lifetime?

We should seriously consider those questions. In our text we read: “In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.” As you can see here, there are two sides to God’s activity in our text. On the one side he deals with the ruthless and the mockers and those who have an eye for evil. On the other hand, as he deals with such, he uses them to bring others to their knees so that they may obtain “fresh joy in the Lord.” So, are you obtaining “fresh joy in the Lord” or are you stumbling over the question as to what God is doing in the world?

I know it is hard to relax, it is for me, but the Lord is bidding us to relax in him. In the words of John A. Braun in his commentary on *Isaiah 1-39*:

For all is not dark. Yes, the Lord will prevent the rebellious from repenting. Yes, the Lord will allow his Word to be proclaimed only to confirm the unbelievers in their rebellion and sin. But there is another side to the activity of God. While the unbelievers are beyond the grace of God, some who hear the prophet’s message will believe. God still works to bring people to faith even in a world that can be characterized as sinful, rebellious, and inhospitable to the gospel [and I would add that the Lord strengthens the smoldering wick].

In the book of Exodus (34:6-7) the Lord descended in a cloud to Moses and stood there with him and proclaimed the name of the Lord to him. The Lord passed before him and declared: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” The Lord will be Lord. It is his prerogative, his exclusive or special right, his power, his privilege. He owes us nothing but is giving us everything. He will do what must be done.

What In The World Is God Doing? He is being Lord and proclaiming his name, showing mercy and undeserved kindness while by no means excusing the guilty. This is what God is doing in the world right now. Whether the river of our life is peaceful or if it is a raging white rapid with unmoveable rocks in our way that cause us to tremble with fear, all of it works to magnify the Savior Jesus Christ and the salvation he has given through his cross. He keeps us mindful of who we were and what we were without him so that in his gift of forgiveness we may not go back to the pigpen, or if we have gone back, he does what he does to get us out of it and clean us up so that we may not be forever lost. **What In The World Is God Doing?** He is saving us! That really should be all that we need to know!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott