

October 22, 2023

Isaiah 45:1-7

“All That Matters!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In 586 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem went into exile under the Babylonians. While the Babylonian captivity was God's judgment on the wicked in Judah and Jerusalem, it was also designed to preserve his believing remnant. God used these events to save his elect.

Now, the prophet Isaiah was sent many years before the Babylonian exile to warn and write prophecies about the future that would strengthen and save the remnant. One of those prophecies is recorded here in our Old Testament lesson - Isaiah 45:1-7. In this section of the Bible, two hundred years before his time, God mentions by name, Cyrus, who will be the king of the Medo-Persian empire. So, two centuries beforehand, God had set apart a man by the name of Cyrus to conquer the Babylonians, and release his people from their captivity so that they could go back and rebuild Judah and Jerusalem.

God is a God of history. He has all things in the universe in his hands. And everything in the universe must conform for one purpose - the salvation of those he has chosen to be his holy people. So, king Cyrus came to Babylon and freed the Israelite captives. In doing so, he prefigured Jesus who came to free his people from their captivity to sin, death, and the devil. The Lord God of Israel says that all these things were set in place so "that people may know [that's you and me], 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. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things." We will interpret these words later in the sermon.

For now, we consider our own situation. Everything in the world appears to be a mess. The list is so long that one can hardly even know where to start or where to end. There are wars and rumors of war. There is a growing economic imbalance in the world between the haves and the have nots. People are dying calamitous deaths. No one is able to discern between right and wrong. People are abandoning Biblical Christianity right and left, and many are rising as self-anointed saviors of humanity. In the mess down here, people are talking and working to build a utopian world order where we are to imagine there is no heaven, no countries, no religion, to save the planet, and where we finally learn to live as one.

Can you imagine what it must have been like for the people of Judah and Jerusalem to literally have to leave their homes and most of their belongings behind to live in a foreign country? Their whole lives were turned upside down. Can you image the incredible churning within their bellies as they looked at one another only to realize that what they knew was now gone? They had to be dumfounded by their situation as we perhaps are becoming dumfounded by ours. But they had the words of Isaiah, as we have his words, and they had words of Moses and all the prophets, as we do too. We are even more blessed to have the words of the New Testament apostles and evangelists.

If you don't mind, I would like to set in front of you the words of Daniel who made this observation while he was a captive in Babylon. He wrote (2:20-22): "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden

things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might ...”

We should be thankful that we also have been given wisdom and might in the Bible, for it is in the Bible that we realize some very important things about God that are designed to calm us down in the midst of so much unrest and uncertainty. Our President, the members of the House and Senate, and the judges on the Supreme Court received their offices because the Lord God placed them there. This is true of the past, and of the present, as well as the future. The leaders of other nations are there because the Lord God has put them there. Times of well-being and times of calamity are also from the Lord. Again, the words of the prophet Isaiah: “I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things.”

This does not mean, as some might say, that it is the Lord who is the origin of evil. Rather, what is being said is that he does allow evil to do its thing. This is from him. Thus, in that sense, it was the Lord God who gave up Judah and Jerusalem to the Babylonians in the first place. Moreover, it is the Lord who makes well-being. It was the Lord God who raised up Cyrus so that the people could go back and rebuild Judah and Jerusalem. So, we are to understand that it is the Lord God who is ultimately in control of every event that shapes world history. And this he does so that his kingdom may come, as we ask in the Lord’s Prayer all the time. Luther writes in the *Large Catechism*:

“But what is God’s kingdom?” Answer, “Nothing other than what we learned in the Creed: God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the devil’s power [1 John 3:8]. He sent Him to bring us to Himself and to govern us as a King of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience. For this reason He has also given His Holy Spirit, who is to bring these things home to us by His holy Word and to illumine and strengthen us in the faith by His power (LC, Part 3, 51 pg. 414).”

In short, the governance of all things in this universe has in mind our rescue. It has in mind our entrance into the kingdom of grace so that we may forever be with the Lord God in glory. It has in mind the entrance of others. When there are days of well-being, it serves that purpose. When there are days of calamity, it serves that purpose. It was that case, when another king by the name of Darius realized this when he threw Daniel into the lion’s den (calamity for Daniel) and then the Lord saved him (by shutting their mouths). Upon witnessing this, Darius remarked, that all should tremble and fear before the true God, “for he is the living God enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions (Dan. 6:26-27).” Yes. What the Lord God allows and does in this down here is always to save us.

So, using the question that Job (2:10) asked his wife, I now ask you: “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” Moreover, we remember that after this question it says that “in all this Job did not sin with his lips.” What about our lips? Tough question. It’s really easy to receive good from God. It’s not so easy to receive evil. So, how may we truly receive both without sinning? That takes us

to the cross of Jesus and our redeemer who lives - his empty tomb. Here we see the love of the Lord. And in that love, do we not receive the fact that one day our skin will be destroyed, yet in our flesh we shall see God? When we die we will be with the Lord and one day we will rise from the dead. Our Lord is able to even sanctify our deaths, for it is written in Revelation 14:13 that the apostle John heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Our deeds don't go before us, but follow as fruits of faith.

So, we embrace both calamity and well-being in the cross of Jesus. It was both for Jesus and both for us because of sin. That cross is both the death of us and the forever life or resurrection of us. And if we can embrace the cross and all that it means, knowing the love of God and that the kingdom is ours forever, then we may certainly embrace the happenings in our world as being God's good and gracious work for our salvation. Are we not at rest in the death of our sins and the new life that is ours by faith in the forgiveness of all our sins? If so, then we should not be surprised or in a panic or depressed over the things that we are constantly seeing in this world, for Hannah sang a long time ago that "it is the Lord who kills and brings to life (2 Sam. 1:6)." This he does for us all the time, and we rejoice as she did for she saw it in view of salvation. In fact, our hearts even yearn within us, because we know that he is saving us. It will not be long before we are with him. Until then, because of this peculiar situation resulting from our fall into sin, God must work in peculiar ways.

So again I ask: "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" Prayerfully for all of us the answer is a resounding "Yes!" for in both we are being saved. All of God's children are being saved. And that is truly **All That Matters!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott