

“I Do All These Things”

*I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster;
I, the LORD, do all these things (Isaiah 45:7).*

We will all experience times in our lives when God seems weak: When life takes an unexpected and unwanted turn, when a personal tragedy rocks our faith or when the circumstances before us seem completely opposed to God’s will and His Word. And when these life-changing reversals occur, we find ourselves desperate for answers. We struggle to make sense of our pain, we frantically try to reconcile the all-powerful, all-present, omniscient and loving God we know from the Bible with the disaster unfolding in front of us...and yet, God seems silent. The diagnosis remains. Repentance doesn’t come. Divorce papers are filed. A loved one dies. The world around us crumbles. And in our frustration and in our despair it seems obvious to us that God must be unwilling or, worse yet, unable to help us in our time of need.

These dark and uncertain days in life create a crisis of faith. And yet, if we examine God’s Word we realize that we are not alone as this same story is played out time and time again in the pages of Scripture. Abram and Sarai wait unsuccessfully for a child. Joseph is betrayed by his brothers and left for dead. Moses watches God’s people suffer abuse at the hands of the Egyptians while the Lord does nothing to stop it. Job laments as his children are killed, his body decays and his friends pass judgment...and yet God is silent.

Israel’s history is filled with stories of struggle and suffering and it’s in the middle of this turbulent tale of God’s chosen people that we find today’s Old Testament reading. Isaiah wrote these words to the people of Judah during a time of national pride and prosperity. The leaders in Jerusalem had watched as the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians and yet, when Isaiah began to preach, their own nation was strong and Jerusalem was safe. But Judah had turned their backs on the Lord and God had called Isaiah to proclaim judgment to a people who had rejected His Word. Two weeks ago, we heard the essence of Isaiah’s message when God compared His people to a vineyard saying, “I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland” (Isaiah 5:5-6).

This prophetic word was realized in 586 B.C. when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and the Temple was destroyed and the people of Judah were taken into captivity. The book of Isaiah repeatedly points to this day of destruction and yet, in the middle of these doomsday prophecies, God continued to speak words of hope and deliverance and, in today’s reading from chapter 45, God promises that He will restore His people; He will return them to the Promised Land; He will rebuild His Temple. But the way He promises to do it...no one would’ve believed.

Look at the first verse of our text. In these words, Isaiah mentions, by name, the ruler that God would use to deliver His people from Babylonian captivity. “This is what the Lord says to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of...” (Isaiah 45:1). And throughout the rest of this reading God speaks to King Cyrus, more than a hundred years before he would even be born and, in the words of Isaiah, He details the ways in which His chosen people would be delivered by the yet-unborn king Cyrus. Now, on its own, this prophecy is remarkable, but to truly grasp the *full* meaning of this text you need to know that Cyrus was not a believer. Cyrus was the king of Persia! He was a pagan ruler who, Isaiah tells us, did “not acknowledge” or even “know” God, and yet the Lord describes this heathen king as one He had, “summoned by name.” Not only that, but we actually hear language in this text that holds Cyrus up as a savior of God’s people. In Isaiah 44:28, God calls Cyrus His “shepherd” who would rebuild the walls and Temple of Jerusalem and, in Isaiah 45:1, Cyrus is called God’s “anointed” which, in Hebrew, is the word “messiah” and in Greek is translated, “Christ.” Christ!?! Messiah!?! These are words we would *never* use to describe an unbelieving, idolatrous, pagan ruler!!! But God *did*.

This reading shows us beyond any doubt that God is in control – not just in His church and not only in the lives of His chosen people – but God is in control of everything and everyone and He will use whoever and whatever He wants to use to accomplish His purposes! There is nothing outside of God’s power; there is nothing outside of His control...even when things seem to be falling apart around us...even when God seems silent.

God says to us today, “I am the Lord and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and I create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things...” and these words drop us to our knees! On one hand we hear Scripture tell us that God, “takes no pleasure in evil” (Psalm 5:4) and that He “tempts no one” (James 1:13). On the other hand we know that not even the tiniest sparrow falls from the sky without God’s knowledge and that nothing happens outside of God’s sustaining power (Luke 12:14; Colossians 1:17). Our confessions tell us that God is not the author of sin and that He does not create evil and yet, even Satan himself is a tool in God’s hand.

I’ll be the first one to tell you that these theological paradoxes do not satisfy. Instead, they lay us low and leave us asking the question, “Why?” If God is in control, why doesn’t He heal me? If God is in control, why doesn’t He fix my marriage? If God is in control, why does evil prosper? If God is in control, why do so many people suffer? My brother and sisters, God has not given us the answers to those questions. The reality is that we live in a broken world and we are people whose hearts and minds have been warped by sin; we don’t understand the mind of God and we don’t know why!

Sooner or later, we will all face a time in our lives when neither human logic nor religious clichés can address the problem of suffering or answer the question, “Why?” and at that moment we need a clear word; a word that doesn’t rely on the wisdom of the world; a word that doesn’t depend on our fickle emotions. And I’m here to tell you today, that the clear word that speaks to our predicament can only come from God and the only word from God that helps in this moment of greatest need is the clear word of life found in Jesus Christ.

You see, this clear Word tells us that through an unspeakable disaster of His own making, “God was pleased...to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:19). Good Friday was no accident and this clear word from God tells us that He sent His Son to the cross where, “God was, in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (II Corinthians 5:19). And this clear word of the cross is the only response to the questions sin creates.

God is in control and just as He used the unbelieving king Cyrus as His tool of deliverance, God will use whoever and whatever He wants to use to accomplish His purpose in our lives as well. We may never know the “who” or the “what” behind God’s work, but we *do* know His saving purpose and, in Christ and through His cross, we know the only “who” and “what” that really matter. We know in a clear word that because God “did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all” He will also “graciously give us all things.” And we know in a clear word that the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel and claimed us in our Baptism and will preserve us by His Word and Sacrament until we enter life everlasting and nothing can change this clear word of God’s promise.

Today, our sovereign, saving God says to us, “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7) and, Paul tells us, that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Rejoice that by the cross you are called and in Christ you are chosen, and cling to these clear words of life:

*“What God ordains is always good: This truth remains unshaken.
Though sorrow need or death be mine, I shall not be forsaken.
I fear no harm, for with His arm
He shall embrace and shield me;
So to my God I yield me” (LSB 760:6). Amen.*

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