

God is in Control, and God has a Gracious Plan

Isaiah 45:5-7,

Sunday after New Year January 4, 2015

Beloved of the Lord.....In Psalm 57, when David fled for his life from Saul, David spoke of his calamity. When something terrible and tragic happens to us suddenly, quickly, and it comes out of nowhere, such is like a heavy hand sent down from heaven, which pushes us down to the ground so we can't get up. In one day, one hour, or one moment, our whole world falls apart and we become confused. God has smitten me. God has crushed me. God has rejected me. God is no longer with me. God has forsaken me. That is what we feel like inside. The control over our own life, which we thought we had, suddenly disappears and we realize we were never in control. We feel helpless and there is nothing we can do to change the situation. Many a widow or widower has felt such helplessness, when their spouse was dying upon a bed. Many a Christian has had their whole world turned upside down in a moment, by one single calamity. The big question is WHY? Why did God do this, or allow that to be done? At that moment many become angry with God. Many accuse God of evil.

But does man have the right to question God?...to rise up in judgment against God?...to accuse God of evil? We do not! And all those who accuse God of evil will be eternally condemned and spend the rest of eternity in hell with the devil. Only those who believe on Christ will be saved. In today's lesson then, regarding our calamities, what we must learn is: God is in control, and God has a gracious plan. These words are true whether you believe them or not, but God surely wants you to believe by looking upon Jesus, the Son of God, who suffered for our sins. This suffering of God Himself defies human reason. If Jesus is God and God is in control, why does God allow Pilate to condemn Him and the Jews to murder Him? But the answer is God is in control, and God has a gracious plan. God knew what He was doing then, and God still knows what He is doing now, delivering us from evil.....saving us from sin. Truthfully, we need calamities to break this proud heart of ours which thinks we are in control of our own lives. We are not God, nor do we know what is best for ourselves. He is God and God knows best, even when He allows evil in our life. So the Lord says, "I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." Therefore in the midst of your calamity dear believer, since God has opened your eyes to Jesus, TRUST God is in control, and remember God has a gracious plan.....and don't forget to pray as David prayed in Psalm 57, "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast."

I. Our Almighty God controls all kings, even the unwilling heathen. We know from verse one, that our text is directly spoken to King Cyrus of the Old Testament, and it is prophetic, for it is spoken before Cyrus was born. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that this Scripture was read to the king, but we cannot be sure. God is indeed giving a message directly to King Cyrus however, for verse one reads, "Thus saith the LORD to

his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him.” Before Cyrus was born, God anointed him, chose him to do and carry out God’s work, God’s will, taking vengeance upon the Babylonians. Cyrus the Great was a heathen king, of the Medes and Persians. He lived from 558 to 529 BC. Isaiah however lived about 700 years before Christ, and so God is writing in advance to Cyrus, thus prophesying to the Jews, and declaring all God would do through Cyrus the king. The Lord says to Cyrus “I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.”

This prophecy came true over 100 years later when Cyrus conquered the great city Babylon. When the city Babylon had reached its zenith, it was an impregnable fortress, with walls 300 feet high. It had 100 gates around it, and these gates were giant brass doors. No one believed Babylon could fall. The Lord Almighty however had a plan, and Babylon fell not by Cyrus, but God working through Cyrus. Cyrus used his army to divert a great river which flowed underneath the walls of Babylon. Then during the night Cyrus marched his troops into the city under the wall on the riverbed. The brass doors were opened from within and they were destroyed just as God foretold. Cyrus also released the Jews who had been slaves. All this God did through Cyrus, for their sake. The word says “For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.”

Cyrus did not know the true God because he was a heathen king, yet God used Cyrus to serve the Lord. Cyrus was a servant of the Lord, doing all God commanded him to do, yet Cyrus was an unwilling servant who did not serve God in faith and love as Christians do. Likewise let us remember when we keep God’s commandments because we are afraid, rather than keeping them by faith and love, we sin against God. All Cyrus did in unbelief was sinful and he was not willingly serving the Lord, yet it was the Lord’s will to use Cyrus to the Lord’s glory. All of his abilities as a leader and commander, his clever plan to divert the river etc., was God’s plan executed by God’s power. And just as we often sinfully take pride in our accomplishments, so Cyrus certainly did, but God is the one who ought to receive all glory. Babylon fell not by Cyrus power, but God’s power. Likewise we do not overcome the evil in this world or Satan’s power by our works, but God’s power, God’s grace. So Psalm 115 says, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.”

Regarding the wicked rulers of our present day, let us then remember David’s words in Psalm 37. David writes “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off.” If we take these words to heart, we will not worry about our heathen president who behaves like a king. He may do what he wants, but he is still an unwilling servant of God whom God will use to God’s glory. God still has power over him and God has it all planned out. As for each believer however, we have a gracious promise from God “The

salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them, and...he shall deliver them from the wicked.”

The heathen thus who rule, even the likes of ISIS or the communists, have their power from God, and God is still ruling through them. In one sense they do God’s will, but they don’t know it. They are not forced to do such naturally, but God sets it all up in advance by His incredible wisdom and power, just as He did Cyrus. So God said to Cyrus, “I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me.” To gird here means God strengthened Cyrus to do God’s will. God stacked the deck in His favor so his armies would conquer all in their path. And so regarding those powers or rulers in our day, even those who are corrupt, walking a crooked path, God is still using them like a paddle to spank and discipline others, sometimes even us. Right now the Muslim world which despises Jesus is being punished by ISIS, but in the end ISIS will be held accountable. Likewise Christians often suffer under such ungodly rulers, but the Gospel also is spread at such times, and martyrs are immediately lifted up to heaven.

When God allows bad things to happen to Christians, we should not question God or doubt His wisdom, but we should “fear, love, and TRUST IN GOD” above all things. Do you think Joseph understood why God allowed his brothers to sell him into slavery? Do you think the Israelites understood why they had to be slaves for 400 years? Do you think the disciples understood when their innocent Lord and Master was nailed to a cross so they had to watch Him bleed and die? The lesson God would have us learn is not that we figure out His ways, but have faith in Him and TRUST God knows what He is doing. This is why Paul said in Romans 11, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! The depths of His riches is the grace of God given you through Jesus Christ. That should be enough for you. All the rest you must leave to God.

II. He rules and controls all things, for the sake of His Church, all believers. The Almighty God above us then who rules all things is not like those fictitious Roman gods who would toy with men for sport. He is not cruel nor does He take pleasure in our suffering, but He does all things for the salvation of all people, even all the heathen who now don’t believe. When God struck the Babylonians by the hand of Cyrus it was so they would repent of their sins and turn to the promise of Christ which they surely heard through the Jews. Likewise in our text this morning, when God is speaking to Cyrus before Cyrus is born, God is preaching to the Jews by way of Isaiah, promising them deliverance from the wicked who oppress them.

All these promises of God still come to us today through Jesus Christ our Lord. Consider all the parallels. Cyrus was a clever conqueror who did something the enemy did not suspect by entering the city upon a riverbed. The great enemy Babylon was overthrown. So Christ overthrew the devil and his kingdom in a way he didn’t expect. The King of all creation was crucified on the cross. In one instance the devil tries to

discourage Jesus away from the cross, but in another instance he is behind Pilate and the Jews who yell “Crucify Him, crucify Him”. God by His power allowed such, used them, that we might be redeemed and saved by blood, so we would even be called the sons of God. And here today in Holy Communion, the Son of God gives you His own body and blood, “given and shed for you for the remission of sins”, but this forgiveness could not be given, if His blood was not first shed in part by Pilate and the Jews whom God used. Yet the same blood would save them, if only they believed.

All of this then was clearly God’s plan, and God was in control of it all, and God had a gracious purpose by it all, and God had predicted and prophesied it all for Jesus Himself prophesied and said, “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” All of God’s plans are thus perfect and well laid out, and His grace is so clearly behind all He suffers His Church to endure. Why then should we doubt it or question it, when rather God would have us believe and simply trust God knows what He is doing, and He is gracious enough to do so! “For my ways are higher than your ways”, and as Paul said, “His ways are past finding out.” It is a vain effort, and quite arrogant when we try to figure out God’s plan. But God is pleased with the littlest child who simply believes and trusts, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Finally beloved of the Lord, consider those gates of Babylon which were both opened and destroyed. In like manner the power of the devil and this world, Babylon, have been destroyed. The wicked will not prevail against God’s Church, for you are God’s anointed, even priests before Him. In a different sense Babylon’s gates were opened when Christ died on the cross for all the ungodly. We were the slaves and prisoners to sin, which Christ set free. We are not Babylon anymore. We are God’s Church, God’s Temple, even the Body of Christ, and now the gates of hell cannot prevail over us. Christ is the Rock of our salvation, and no devil can erase the power of Jesus’ blood to cleanse and redeem. It is YOU who have been cleansed and cleaned by Holy blood. The gates of hell are closed. The gates of heaven are open. Fear not, only believe. Amen.