

Sermon Draft

Text: Isaiah 45:1–7

Sermon: “God is in Charge. Always”

The *Collect* calls upon the Lord to give us the fortitude to pass through temporal challenges with our sights on the eternal.

This is a prayer that rests in the God who oversees history (the temporal) for the sake of the eternal. Consider God’s use of his chosen Cyrus in our *Old Testament Reading* from Isaiah and Jesus’ insistence that Jews are to pay their taxes due Caesar in our *Gospel* lesson from Matthew 22:21).

From these examples, we see the earthly kingdoms of Persia and Rome, though neither acknowledges the authority of Jehovah, still exist with the authority that the one true God granted them for his purpose.

It doesn't seem like a stretch with our doubting hearts to look at the world and all of humanity's selfish intentions and conclude that evil has a shot at winning the day. We watch in horror as radical Islamic terrorists and self-absorbed lunatics with assault weapons attack people in their workplace or in public and mercilessly slaughter them in the name of something they believe. It's not only wicked and deranged; it's terribly unfair!

It causes us to begin to believe that evil has a good shot at triumphing. There always exists the idea that reality consists of a continuous duel between good and evil, each having equal power. It entices us to adopt a sort of yin-and-yang method to life, suggesting that there will always be a balance between these two opposing forces.

Take heart and be encouraged, dear Christian, because the Holy Scriptures tell us in very resolute terms that this is not the case. And one of many examples that brings us peace is the prophecy of Isaiah as it predicted the rise of King Cyrus of the Persian Empire. In that prophecy, we discover that all that evil musters against God is no competition for the Holy Trinity's intent to build on his righteousness. Isaiah proclaims that Jehovah uses someone for his divine purpose even when that individual does not acknowledge him as the one true God. In other words, our Father in heaven takes all that evil and rejection unleashed against his righteousness and makes it submit to his divine purpose. Even when it looks the worst, **God oversees history for His purpose in eternity. Even evil must bow to God!**

In our Old Testament Reading, God calls Cyrus, King of Persia, "his anointed" one: ***"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"*** (v 1).

Do you find this surprising, maybe shocking, because Cyrus is not a king of God's people; he's not even a man of faith. He's a pagan. He's the ruler of a foreign empire who will come to rule over God's people only because he's a conqueror. Our text says twice, ***"you do not know me"*** (vs 4c, 5c). Cyrus didn't know, didn't believe in, the true God. And yet God says, ***"I call you by your name, I name you"*** (v 4b). God even calls Cyrus "anointed." That's the title of guess who! the Messiah, the Christ! Pagan Cyrus sharing the same title as Jesus?!

So, what's the Lord got to do with Cyrus? Well, ***"I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name"*** (vs 2–3).

The Lord would subdue nations before Cyrus, enable him to conquer foreign powers—even mighty Babylon—almost as if the gates of walled cities would just swing open for his army to march in. And Cyrus would collect the plunder, the wealth of all his enemies. So, it happened. History actually records that the Medo-Persian Empire conquered lands with unprecedented speed and ease. Even Babylon fell almost without a fight.

What's God doing here? Why does he give such success to evil, to unbelievers?

That's the same question we often ask ourselves about our own world, isn't it! Satan and his evil forces seem to be winning. Hate abounds! Hate for Christians!

Even closer to home, we see evil seeming to triumph right in our own schools, on our own jobsites, among our own circles that we counted as friends. Yes, even in our own country hate abounds, life is of no value how many thousands of unborn babies are killed each year right here in the United States of America?

How many people are murdered each day? Senseless violence, drug addiction, crime, the list goes on. So, what has God been up to? Sleeping on the job?

Cyrus leads the Persians to defeat the empire of Babylon.

For what reason did God direct this history? Low and behold, we

read: ***“For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my***

chosen” (v 4). Jehovah pours out his grace upon his chosen

Israel through this conquest and through an unholy nation that

does not acknowledge the one true God, though Cyrus had

other motives for his conquests. How did God use this conquest?

After seventy years of Babylonian captivity, the fall of

Babylon destroys the captors. And among Cyrus’s very early

decrees after his greatest victory is the announcement that the

Jews can go home! God uses Cyrus to return his chosen back to

their homes and worship.

Throughout Scripture, there are examples like this. God makes it abundantly clear that in the midst of evil carrying out its diabolical plans, tempting you as a Christian to believe that hope is lost and God is no longer in control, the Lord has in no way lost his hold.

The promise he has made to us in our Baptism is still sure, that we are his and he is governing all things for our benefit. While Holy Scripture makes it clear that evil is judged by the righteousness of God, it goes even further, assuring us that evil must even submit to God's will.

There are many examples, but let's focus now on what Judah's return from exile set up in history—history that God steps into, intervenes in, and guides. It is the arrival of another "anointed" and chosen King to do the will of the Father.

This one, unlike Cyrus, submitted perfectly to the Father's will. And see the evil that came upon this, the Son of God! How about Satan himself in the wilderness; Judas who betrayed him; Caiaphas who sent him to Pontus Pilate with false charges; the crowd that called out for his crucifixion; the Roman soldiers who mocked him, beat him, and nailed him to a cross? Look at what evil does. Look at how it appears as if God is out of control, leaving evil to succeed in snuffing out the divine intentions of God.

That is, until we hear the words of Jesus call out to his Father to forgive them. And then we marvel at the acknowledgment of Jesus that his Father chose to forsake him. And we marvel even more to find out that the condemnation of Christ, the begotten Son of the Father, whom he loved, was the very purpose of his being chosen—for the evil in us to be

forgiven. Do you see that even the evil in us must bow?

And lo and behold, we find the pinnacle of how God makes evil's intentions bow down to his will for his righteousness to be ours. Righteousness is ours now, even as evil continues to raise its ugly head. It has no hope to change what God has accomplished for us!

God uses those like Cyrus and others for his purpose for our ultimate good. May our Lord's peace and rest be ours in spite of what still goes on all around us in this world of wickedness. Rest in knowing that none of it will change what God has done for our eternity in his kingdom. Rest in knowing that nothing **"will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Rom 8:39). For he even uses those who do not acknowledge him for his will and purpose.

Amen