

## **Providence of God**

Isaiah 44:24-45:13

Do you remember what we learned from Isaiah last week?

God has chosen to demonstrate the GLORY of His GRACE by FREEING His People from Captivity and FORGIVING their Sin.

*Aren't you glad about that!*

This week, our sermon text explains HOW God will Free His People from their Captivity.

What we will see is God's PROVIDENCE at work to accomplish His Purposes.

But what we will see is that God does not always accomplish His purposes in a conventional way ... or even in a way that we like! In fact, sometimes its strange and difficult.

**Our sermon text is going to teach us 3 Important Lessons:**

The Providence of God involves STRANGE PLANS, accomplishes GOOD PURPOSES, and calls for ABSOLUTE TRUST.

And these 3 Lessons about God's PROVIDENCE make a **HUGE difference on a daily basis.**

**Turn with me to Isaiah 44-45.**

**Our sermon text is 44:23-45:13 and it can be divided into 3 sections.**

- 44:23-28 God announces HIS STRANGE PLAN to redeem Israel from captivity in Babylon.
- 45:1-8 God explains HIS GOOD PURPOSES through this Strange Plan.
- 45:9-13 God calls for ABSOLUTE TRUST from His People.

**I'm going to READ them and EXPLAIN each as we walk through the text.**

## LESSON #1: The Providence of God often involves STRANGE PLANS. (44:23-28)

**Isaiah 44:23** Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel. **24** Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, **25** who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish, **26** who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited,' and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins'; **27** who says to the deep, 'Be dry; I will dry up your rivers'; **28** who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.' "

- **REVIEW: Historical Context** of God announcing He will free Judah from captivity in Babylon.
- This is an **Example of God's PROVIDENCE**.
  - When we talk about God's PROVIDENCE it's different than His Sovereignty.
  - **Paraphrasing PIPER: God's Sovereignty** focuses on God's right and power to do all that he wills, but in itself, it does not express any design or goal ... **God's Providence** contains the idea of God's power put to purposeful action to accomplish His will.
- 13 Statements teach us that **God's Providence is responsible for everything!**
  - 1 statement that He is the One who formed Israel
  - 3 statements that He is the One who created the universe
  - 4 statements that He is the One who confounds the predictions of diviners.
  - 2 statements that He is the One who fulfills the Word of His Prophets
  - 2 statements that He is the One who has decreed the restoration of Jerusalem.
  - As Nate Read in Ps 135:6 *Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth...*
  - **Final Statement** – v28 He is the One who will choose Cyrus to accomplish this Restoration.
- **WHAT!?? CYRUS** – Who is Cyrus?
  - REMEMBER: Our best understanding is that Isaiah wrote this prophesy **100** years BEFORE Judah is taken captive by Babylon, **170** years before Cyrus conquered Babylon and released the Jews to return to Jerusalem.
- **THIS IS A STRANGE PLAN:** 2 things must have been particularly TROUBLESOME (i.e. 45:9-13)
  - #1: God calls Cyrus: "My Shepherd." In 44:28 and "My Anointed" in 45:1 These are terms given to Moses and David and MESSIAH ... NOT a Pagan GENTILE!
  - #2: God says Cyrus will perform "My Purposes." How can a pagan Gentile fulfill the "desires" of the Holy God of Israel?

*After God announces HIS STRANGE PLAN to redeem Israel from captivity in Babylon.  
45:1-8 God explains HIS GOOD PURPOSES through this Strange Plan.*

## **LESSON #2: The Providence of God always accomplishes GOOD PURPOSES. (45:1-8)**

**45:1** 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: **2** "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, **3** 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. **4** For the sake of my servant JACOB, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. **5** I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, **6** that PEOPLE may know, 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. **7** I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things. **8** "Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout; I the LORD have created it.

- **NOTICE** that God is PERSONALLY INVOLVED in the success of Cyrus's Military Campaigns.
  - 3 STATEMENTS V2-3: "I will go before you ... I will break down the doors ... I will give you the treasures of your enemies."
  - For 3 PURPOSES ... The first is for CYRUS, second ISRAEL, third the WORLD.
- **PURPOSE #1 CYRUS: v3** that YOU may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
- **PURPOSE #2 ISRAEL: v4** For the sake of my servant JACOB, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.
- **PURPOSE #3 WORLD: v5** I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, **6** that PEOPLE may know, 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.
- **God wants Cyrus, Israel, and the World to know "I AM THE LORD"** and He emphasizes 4x:
  - V5 "There is no other." >> "Besides me there is no God."
  - V6 "There is none besides me." >> "There is no other."
- V7 God claims absolute sovereignty and personal responsibility for everything that happens in the universe! **v7** I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.
- V8 And then He calls the UNIVERSE to drip and pour and bear the fruit of His Salvation.
- We learn in this section that God's Providence –even His STRANGE Providence **ALWAYS accomplishes His GOOD PURPOSES.**

After explaining His purposes, God, in **45:9-13** God calls for **ABSOLUTE TRUST** from His People.

### **LESSON #3: The Providence of God emphatically calls for ABSOLUTE TRUST. (45:9-13)**

**45:9** “Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles?’ **10** Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ or to a woman, ‘With what are you in labor?’ ” **11** Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: “Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands? **12** I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. **13** I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward,” says the LORD of hosts.

- This section tells us that Judah had a serious problem with God’s STRANGE PLAN and is Questioning, not sincerely, but **DISPUTING with God about it**.
- Woe = Your problem with God’s Providence is a REFUSAL to let God be GOD!
- This section shows us we are as different from God as the lifeless clay is different than the Intelligent and Creative Potter.
  - God is the Maker and the Parent. .... We are the clay and the child.
  - Rather than DISPUTING with God, His Providence calls us to ABSOLUTE TRUST.
- V11-13 Just as God is PERSONALLY responsible for CREATION, He is personally responsible for CYRUS. **Bottomline: TRUST ME!**

#### **SUMMARY: What we see in Cyrus is an example of God’s Providence:**

The Providence of God often involves STRANGE PLANS, always accomplishes GOOD PURPOSES, and emphatically calls for ABSOLUTE TRUST. (45:9-13)

#### **OTHER EXAMPLES: Joseph ...**

- God’s STRANGE PROVIDENCE ordained that Joseph be sold into slavery, wrongfully accused and sent to prison, gain Pharaoh’s favor, and be exalted to the throne ...
- To accomplish God’s GOOD PURPOSE of delivering His people from bondage in Egypt.
- **God’s STRANGE PROVIDENCE accomplished His GOOD PURPOSES.**
- *We could go through the Photo Album of the Old Testament and see portraits of God’s Strange Providence in the lives of Job, David, Esther, Daniel*

#### **BEST EXAMPLE: Jesus ...**

- God’s STRANGE PROVIDENCE ordained and prophesied the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus
- To accomplish God’s GOOD PURPOSE of delivering His people from SIN and DEATH.
- **God’s STRANGE PROVIDENCE accomplished His GOOD PURPOSES.**

But you say, that’s just the BIG STUFF and for Redemptive purposes! Then consider ...

#### **PERSONAL EXAMPLE: Paul ...**

- Phil CH1, Paul explains that God’s STRANGE PROVIDENCE ordained that he would be taken from a very prosperous church-planting mission and locked away in prison
- To accomplish God’s GOOD PURPOSE of saving some common labors and encouraging a local church to endure suffering.
- **God’s STRANGE PROVIDENCE accomplished His GOOD PURPOSES.**

## **APPLICATION: HOW DOES ALL OF THIS MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON A DAILY BASIS FOR US?**

John Piper wrote a massive work called "PROVIDENCE" – at the end, in classic Piper style, he gives "*10 results of seeing and savoring the all-embracing, all-pervasive, invincible, and purposeful providence of God.*" ***I'll do the same, except I'll just share 3.***

### **#1: Seeing and Savoring the Providence of God GLORIFIES GOD**

- The Providence of God demonstrates that He is the LORD and there is no other.
- Everything is part of God's design.
- As Allen read in Romans 11, *Everything is from him and through him and to him, for his glory.*
- V7 LORD makes two sweeping statements about His Providence: 7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.
  - God claims to be PERSONALLY responsible for everything in Nature (Light and Darkness are Polar Opposites in Creation) and everything in History (Well-Being and Calamity are Polar opposites of the human experience).
  - These things do NOT happen by Chance or other gods and NOT MERELY as the result of Man's actions.
  - PIPER: "Some might think that if God is presented with the one or the other (light or dark, well-being or calamity), he can manage it for his purposes. Isaiah's purpose is to rule out that way of understanding providence. The language of forming and creating and making communicates something very different from managing or guiding what is already there. It communicates that God is the one who decides what is there. In other words, as Creator, God is never limited to managing what he finds at hand. Indeed ... the Creator never "finds" what he has not first appointed to be put in place."
  - EVERYTHING happens under the direct providence of a sovereign God who is accomplishing His good purposes.
- **IMPLICATION IS THIS:**
  - The God of Israel is the LORD of the universe, not just a local deity.
  - All of History is the outworking of God's purposes.
  - God can use anyone and anything to accomplish His purposes.
  - Everyone is accountable to the LORD God of Israel.

### **#2: Seeing and Savoring the Providence of God HUMBLER US**

- As the people of this GOD, it is incredibly humbling to think that He exercises His authority and power for the purposes of making a name for Himself by GRACE: FREEING His People from Captivity and by FORGIVING their Sin.
- Seeing this causes us to fall on our faces in humble gratitude and worship >> specifically to the ONE WHO accomplished our redemption, the Greater Cyrus, the Shepherd, the Anointed, LORD Jesus Christ.

### #3: Seeing and Savoring the Providence of God EXPLAINS OUR DIFFICULTY

- Considering the direct application of this text, you can be sure that Every difficulty, every HARD PROVIDENCE you experience is:
  - HOW God has chosen to FREE you from captivity and redeem you from sin.
  - HOW God has chosen to advance the Gospel to others around you.
  - HOW God has chosen to make a name for Himself through you.
- I may not like THE WAY He has chosen to accomplish these purposes, but I like the RESULT of these purposes.
- So as PIPER writes: “seeing and savoring the Providence of God helps me to be patient and faithful amid of the most *inexplicable circumstances* of life.”
- **OR as the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 puts it:**  
**Q27:** What do you understand by the providence of God?  
**ANSWER:** *The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth with all creatures, and so governs them, that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, **yes, all things**, come not by chance, but by His **Fatherly hand**.*

***Christian, you can TRUST GOD even when you experience STRANGE and HARD PROVIDENCE because He is always accomplishing His GOOD PURPOSES.***