

A Message to Cyrus

Proper 24

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Isaiah 45:1-7

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As you know, I'm not much of a sports' fan. I don't watch games very much at all—I would much rather listen to music or watch a movie. Sometimes, though, movies and sports intercept. While I don't watch sports games very often, I am not against watching sports movies on occasion.

In a couple of movies, there has been a football play that I'm not sure if they use in games in real life or if they just use them in the films. The quarterback will get the ball to another player, or take it himself, and run it up the side of the field. As that player advances the ball, another player will run out in front of him, clearing the path of any who would tackle the one with the ball.

Again, I don't know if this has ever been used in games in real life or not, but it seems to me to be a good way to advance the ball up the field. While it may not have been used in football before, it has been done.

Convoys would be used in getting shipments from location to location during the World Wars, with armed ships making it safe for the cargo ships to cross.

Even in our Old Testament text, the idea was expressed. God told His anointed servant Cyrus that He would “go before (him) and level the exalted places.”

Verse 1

“Thus (said) 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 be closed: ‘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...’”

God can use anyone He wants to to accomplish His purposes—including those who do not believe in Him. Here in our Old Testament text, we hear about one of the ultimate examples of Him preparing to do just that. Our text is from Isaiah, a book of prophecy written before the Israelites would be sent into the Babylonian Captivity. They would be under that captivity for generations, but God would finally free them. And His chosen instrument for that delivery would be Cyrus.

God speaks beforehand how He will lead the way for Cyrus His anointed. God would be as one of those football players blocking the way for the man with the ball, who, in this case, would be Cyrus. He would render the nations around powerless to defeat Cyrus and would “loose the belts of kings.” In those days, soldiers would gird up their loins to prepare for battle, so by loosing their belts, the Lord God would make all the other kings unprepared to fight against Cyrus.

These things God would do for Cyrus because He had given Him His Word. He promised to be with him long before Cyrus would even begin his life. Is that not the case for you and me, dear friends in Christ? Has not God promised to be with us and not forsake us for the sake of His Son? Did He not make those promises long before we were even born? To be sure, there would have been those who gave up on God's Word and promises as they awaited Cyrus and if he did not appear in their lifetimes. Yet history proves that God did just as He had promised: He delivered His people from their captivity by the hand of Cyrus.

In these Last Days, God has already told us by His Word, “scoffers will come...with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell

asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished...The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:3b-9).”

Verse 2

In both these days and the days of Isaiah, God knew that there would be those who would refuse His Word and who would scoff at Him. The interesting thing is that He could, did, and still does use *them* for His purposes. In our text, God foretold Cyrus “‘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 on you by your name. 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.’”

Here we get word that Cyrus would be used by God despite the fact that he would not know God. It can be amazing and comforting for those who have faith to know that God does indeed work all things together for good for those who believe—even using what non-believers do. But it is certainly better in the long run for those whom God uses who have faith.

Of ourselves, we would never willingly be used by God or put Him first as He desires. We would be just as bad off as Cyrus if it were not for the true “Anointed One,” the Messiah who would come following the events of our text, Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus would come and live and die and be raised for the sins of everyone. But sadly for the Cyruses out there who scoff or do not acknowledge God in faith based in His Son, it will not go well for them when He returns.

It may be that things go well for non-believers for a time. Even Cyrus would have a reign that other kings would not be able to stop or touch. Yet as God points out to us, Cyrus would be used despite the fact he would not believe in God with true faith—faith based in the true “Anointed One” to come.

God would permit things to go well for Cyrus for a time, but ultimately, things would not go well for him in the end. God points out Cyrus’ fault and says quite explicitly and openly in our closing verses that His desire is for all to come to faith in Him and to recognize that He is the only true God and the only true way to salvation.

Verse 3

God spoke to Cyrus and all who would hear His Word “‘I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, 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. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.’”

This is the very reason we keep the Old Testament: to show that God keeps His Word and His promises. “‘(T)hat people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west’” that there is only one way to salvation—through Jesus Christ, the Anointed One who would come after our text, and in no one else. The Old Testament gives us many, many examples of God making promises. Some of them were fulfilled in the times before Christ came, but most of them were about—and fulfilled in—Jesus Himself.

Cyrus was prophesied to deliver the people of Israel from their captivity to Babylon—and God delivered on that promise. Likewise He promised that there was and is only one God and only one way to salvation, His Son Jesus, and He will make good on that promise as well.

Finally, God has promised that for all those ““from the rising of the sun to the west”” “that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).” Unlike Cyrus, we have been called according to God’s purpose in Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit. Again, of our own, we would be just as lost as Cyrus; but because God sent His Son Jesus to pay for our sins on the cross, He has also sent you His Holy Spirit that you might believe. And because you believe in His Son through that Spirit, all His promises come to fruition and completion and good for you—even the one from Romans 8 I read just a few moments ago: “that for those who love God (through His Spirit) all things work together for good.” All this is only possible and only happens in the only true God and His only Son our Savior Jesus the Christ, the Anointed One. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.