

Title: Who's holding the leash?
Text: Isaiah 10.5-19
Theme: God is Sovereign
Series: Isaiah #14
Prop Stmtnt God is Sovereign even over the evil choices of man and uses them to fulfill his perfect purposes.
Aim: I aim to move my people to trust God no matter what, even in the face of calamity of the deepest sort.

Read Text:

Tim Tebow is the starting quarterback for the Denver Broncos. He is also an outspoken Christian. His football critics have been publicly relentless in their criticism of his abilities, the fact that he was named the starter 5 games ago and the fact that Denver has won all five of those games has been nothing short of maddening for them. Frankly, I don't care if he ever wins a game. I appreciate his boldness for Christ. And I do not think winning five games in a row validates his testimony or advances the gospel at all. I do think that his outspokenness makes him a target that many want to shoot at, and many want to see him fail. They want dirt on this guy in order to dismiss what he believes. The fact that he has been part of a five game win streak just makes some of the cynics apoplectic. And I confess that I get more than a little bit of satisfaction from their consternation. Tim's situation exposes an axiom that is embraced to a large degree within the umbrella of popular Christianity, and that is this:

I. If God is on your side, you will win.

This is not a new idea. While the south was singing "Dixie" during the civil war, the north was singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," believing that if God is on your side, you will win. During Isaiah's day, the same idea was very prevalent. Before kings went into battle they would offer enormous sacrifices to the "gods" in order to curry their favor. It was understood that while wars were fought on the earth, the real battles took place between the gods. The wars were simply the revelation of who had the bigger god. Every nation had its own god (gods). You wanted everyone in the world to know that your god was the best. One of the reasons why the Jews were easy to hate was because they believed and proclaimed that their God was the only true God. Anyone who claims that type of exclusivity in a world of many gods is asking for it – aren't they? But, what if He really is the only one true God? If that is the case, then that means that you should win every battle.

But there was more to the story. The children of Israel were not following God. While they had a history, the Law, and a tradition that spoke of the one true God, the truth was, their hearts were not true to Him. God had told them of all of the benefits of following him. And, they liked the benefits. The problem was, they liked the benefits more than they did God. But, the benefits were only to be a taste of the goodness of God himself. If you separate the benefits from God, then you end up worshiping the gift instead of the giver. That is what was going on with Israel. They were following other gods. They

wanted to define what it meant to “win”. The other gods seemed to offer more crops, or more pleasure, or more power. The reality is, all other gods are creations of mankind and are nothing more than a veiled attempt on the part of man to worship man instead of God. So, when Israel (and Judah) treated God as if He were simply one of many gods, he had to respond to this lie. In fact, he had already told them back in Deut. 27, that if they turned from God to worship other gods, or if they pretended to keep worshiping God while worshiping other gods, they would suffer enormous consequences. God said, I will raise up other nations who serve other gods (even the ones that you are worshiping) to punish you because you need to understand that all other gods will betray you. I am the only God who can be trusted and I am worthy of your trust – no matter what.

So, is it true, that if God is on your side; you will win? Well, when you look at the confrontation of David with Goliath, we would have to say – what? Yes! When you look at Daniel’s night in the lion’s den and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s toasty time in the furnace, we would again say, “yes!” But what about Abel? He pleased God and was still murdered by his brother. Was God not on his side? What about Jeremiah? What about Hosea? What about Isaiah? These were prophets who gave their lives over to serve God, who were rejected, ridiculed, persecuted, and probably martyred (Isaiah) because they were on God’s side. All of this relates to the theme of trust. Who are you going to trust? This section of Isaiah’s prophecy brings us back to this question. Are you willing to trust God, no matter what? Are you willing to trust him because He is altogether lovely, beautiful, good and perfect? Are you willing to trust him even when he ordains circumstances that are difficult and that in the moment do not look like winning? Are you willing to trust him that he holds the leash on all things and has ordained and determined that all things serve his ultimate purpose to make Christ known, to make the gospel known, to draw a people for his own from every tribe and language and nation? Are you willing to trust him, when in the moment, it does not make sense?

What about James, who was executed by Herod? Was God not on his side? After all, when Peter was sentenced by this same evil king, how come an angel of the Lord delivered Peter, but just a few days before did not deliver James? It makes it rather difficult at the prayer meeting for James’ widow when Peter’s wife praises God for Peter’s deliverance – don’t you think? Did God love Peter more? But, what is the ultimate example of this? What about Christ? Was he not on God’s side? Of course he was – He is God. Can you say that going to the cross was winning? Or, maybe we ought to say that, **If God is on your side, you win, maybe now, but definitely – later, definitely then.**

So, even in the Old Testament, we see examples of people who pleased God and who (like David) appeared to win. We also see in the Old Testament examples of people who pleased God and who (like Abel, Isaiah) did not appear to win. Perhaps we need to understand what it means to win. The person, who wins, is the person who ends up with the prize. Who is the hero of the Bible? Christ! What did God make us for? He made us to be a kingdom and bride for his Son, Jesus Christ? What did God do in the Garden of Eden? He lived with his children. What is God’s ultimate goal for us? What is our ultimate prize? The prize is to enjoy us as He enjoys himself and for us to enjoy Him and

enjoy each other as He enjoys Himself. Let this sink in deep, real deep. Christ is the means to that enjoyment. That means that Christ is not the consolation prize for the person who finished second, who “did not win” in this life, or who did not survive cancer. Christ is the prize! We can know the prize, trust the prize, love the prize, but we will not know, trust and love the prize like we should, while we are on this earth, in this present darkness. But, we will see him as he is and will know, even as we are known. So, if God is on our side, we win! Even though we may appear to lose as the world sees it, we have, in reality already won if we have Christ. We have not yet fully experienced all of the realities of that victory. All victories now, are only little previews of the ultimate victory that is already ours. While the seeds for this way of thinking are planted in the Old Testament, the New Testament unpacks this a little more. The blessings promised in the Old Testament, were intended to lead the people to enjoy the ultimate blessing – which is God!

This was the point that Paul was attempting to get through to the believers in Corinth. (Turn to 2 Corinthians 4) They were saying that he really did not look like a winner. He was not very impressive in appearance, he was not a very good speaker, he had some obvious problems, and of course, the guy keeps getting thrown in jail. Aren't you supposed to get your best life now? Aren't you supposed to win at business, football, cheerleading, etc? What good is God, if you can't get a good ACT score, or get a job that you like, or get a boyfriend who isn't a jerk? In 2 Corinthians, Paul goes right after this issue. He says, “Hold the phone!” We have Christ! That's all that we need. But, understand this. The gift may not look that impressive at the moment.

2 Corinthians 4.7 – We are jars of clay. We are not impressive Ming Vases, we are common, and disposable jars of clay. We are weak, but God's power in us, isn't. God uses the common, the weak, and the broken, to put his gospel on display. God uses our weakness in order to help us NOT trust ourselves but instead to trust in Him. Look at v.8. We are afflicted in every way. Let's say that we had a sign up sheet in the Gathering Space for all those who want to be afflicted this week. Do you think people would run out to sign up like they do for tickets to the Ladies Tea? Anyone here want to sign up for affliction? Of course not! Why not? Because we think that affliction is bad, it means that you are losing. Well, if that is the case, then why does Paul say, that he is not crushed? If affliction was so bad, then why doesn't he quit? Maybe he knows something that you don't know. He goes and says that he is “perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted by not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” WHY NOT??? Why not curse God and die Paul. V.10, notice now, he speaks of the reality of following Christ and that it means that he lives as one who is identified with Christ. Christ suffered rejection. Paul suffered rejection. Christ suffered persecution Paul suffered persecution. But notice the “so that” Look at the purpose statement. Look at the goal. Look at the result of all of this. “*So that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*” It may look like death, but it is life. (v.12) It may look to some like losing, but it really is winning. That is why (v.16) WE DO NOT LOSE HEART!!! “*Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things*

that are unseen are eternal.” So, when you understand that if you are on God’s side, you win, now and later. Coming to faith in Christ is the only means by which you can be on God’s side. Faith in Christ is giving up in order to gain. It is a dying in order to live. It is a willingness to be identified with a “loser” in order to be counted as one with Him. In other words, you give up what the world thinks is so important in order to gain what really matters. But your “winning of what matters now”, is in direct proportion to your “losing of what doesn’t matter now”. Sadly, most people confuse the things that matter with the things that don’t. In dying we live. In serving, we lead. In giving, we receive. In losing, we win.

I bring this up because Isaiah is about to write to the remnant of God’s people who are faithful in the midst of all of the unfaithfulness of those who were supposed to be God’s people. Not all of the “people of God” were really the “people of God.” Most were pretenders. They “followed God” as the cultural thing to do, but it was not with their hearts. So, as the pretenders, they were going to experience the consequences of their unbelief, but in so doing, they were going to take down the nation with them and those who were really faithful were going to be the collateral damage. So, Isaiah is writing to tell the true believers not to lose heart. Isaiah knows who is on the throne (chap 6). He knows that even though it looks like evil is winning, it isn’t. It looks like Assyria is winning, but Assyria is on a leash and God holds the leash.

II. God is Sovereign over all, even evil.

A. **The Enemies of God do His bidding.** (5-11)

God is holding the leash on all things – even the enemy. Now, the enemy does not know that he is doing the bidding of God. He thinks that he is making choices because it is in his heart to destroy other nations. Assyria has no clue that she is carrying out the greater purposes of God. And, it is difficult for the remnant of believers to understand that as well. Now, today, we can look back on history and we can see God’s purposes in the rise and fall of these empires and we can see His providences and oversight of epic battles and incredible details. But in the moment, it is not easy to see that. This text is a great passage of hope for Isaiah and for the remnant to know that even the enemies of God are on a leash. Even when the enemy appears to win, he loses! Even when God’s people appear to lose, they win. Why?

B. **The Enemies of God will not stand.** (12-19)

No one who stands against God wins. There was coming a day when the faithful remnant would be carried away from their land by their enemies. In that moment it would look as if God was no more than just another god, and that Israel and Judah were just another nation and that their law was just another collection of traditions and cultural habits. But God was going on record. He is not just another God. He is the God who saves. Judah may lose her land, but in the end, she will get it back. Isaiah may even lose his life, but in the end, he will get it back. Why? Because there is coming One, one day who will win.

But he won't do it the way that we think; he will do it by dying and then living to die no more. Will you trust him?