

Title: There's no God like our God, pt.3
Text: Isaiah 44.23 – 45.13
Theme: The uniqueness of God
Series: Isaiah #38
Prop Stmtnt: God's unique person and position demands trust and worship from us.

In recent years there have been quite a few apocalyptic movies that attempt to portray either the end of the world or the end of the world as we know it. As we have worked our way through the book of Isaiah, we could say that there are clearly portions of it that are apocalyptic. Isaiah, however is not imagining what the end of Judah and Jerusalem is going to be like, he is describing, in detail, what it indeed IS going to be like. God unveils his plan to Isaiah, and it is sobering. Let me explain.

From the first verse of this book, we learn that Isaiah was a prophet for a long time. In the beginning, he was calling upon the people (and the king) to repent and trust God. They refused. This pattern was repeated over and over until Hezekiah came to the throne. And then, for a few brief years, there was some hope. Hezekiah actually believed God, and saw what God could do. But, those years of faith did not last and the people returned to their idolatry. Isaiah who initially warned them of the possibility of disaster, if they followed that road, gradually began to speak of the disaster with certainty. But there was more. Yes, God would bring grave consequences upon the people who rebelled against, him, but God was going to do something else. He would not leave his people in bondage. God was going to rescue them.

It is sort of like this. Let's say that you are 50 years old and you inherit a \$100,000. You are 15 years from retirement and you ask two financial planners what you ought to do. The one says, "Put it into the stock market with me and I will get you a 10% annualize return. When you are ready to retire that \$100,000 will have grown to a little over \$418,000." Well, that sounds attractive. So, you talk to the other advisor who says, "The stock market is going to crash in the next 5 years. If you invest it now, your investment will most likely lose about 60% of its value." So, here you are. The one says that you can have over \$400,000 in 15 years and other says you will have about \$40,000. So, let me ask you this. Whom do you want to believe? Of course, you want to believe the one who says that you can get \$400,000. But, whom should you believe? Well, my little story reveals our problem. Neither advisor knows with absolute certainty what is going to happen. But, if the stock market does crash, like the second one predicts, and, if that same advisor then says that it is now time to invest into stocks, you are going to be a bit more likely to follow the advice – aren't you?

In a way, that is the position that Isaiah was in. Except that he was the spokesman for God. His predictions were not guesses, but were guaranteed, because God had said it. He said that Assyria would conquer Syria, Israel, most of Judah, but not Jerusalem – and it happened exactly that way. He said that Judah and Jerusalem would fall to Babylon – and it happened exactly that way. He said that Babylon

would fall to the Persians – and it happened that way. He said that a ruler named Cyrus would rise to power – and it happened that way. He said that Cyrus would proclaim freedom for the exiled Jews to return to their home and that Cyrus would decree that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and the foundation of the Temple would be laid – and it happened that way.

Now, think of the people to whom Isaiah wrote. He wrote for the people who were alive in his day who were being warned of their rebellion and the coming judgment of God upon the land. They could see that Isaiah was right about the Assyrians.

Message – Repent and believe because God is righteous, almighty and merciful.

He also wrote with an eye for those who would be taken into exile. They would have even more evidence to believe because they experienced what Isaiah predicted about the Babylonians.

He also wrote with an eye for those who would return from exile. The message would be not to repeat the same sins of their fathers. And these people would have even more evidence to believe because they experienced the amazing rise to power of Cyrus who did exactly what Isaiah (God) had said.

But there is more. As we will see in the coming chapters, God predicts by name, the man who will restore the Jews back to their land, as a preview of the fact that God is going to send them the ultimate Savior, Redeemer, King and Restorer, in the person of Jesus Christ, whom Isaiah describes as the Suffering Servant. The evidence is all here in this book. God has gone on record ahead of time, spelling out details of the future to demonstrate to people then and to us now, that there is no god like our God. There is no one who can predict, ordain and execute all things.

1. ...Who has planned and accomplished our salvation
2. ...Who is all in
3. ...Who understands the depth of our need
4. ...Who cares for you
5. ...Who controls all things
6. ...Who has no equal

So, in response to all of this, and in anticipation of what is yet to be revealed about God and how he is going to rescue his people, the command goes forth for the heavens to sing and for the depths of the earth to shout, for the mountains to break forth into singing and for the forests and every tree in them to join aloud. We just read last week how trees are chopped down in order to provide wood for a fire and wood for idols. Here, trees are not chopped down for idolatry, but are free to sing. Wow, have you ever heard a tree sing? I fully recognize that this could be a figurative expression, but I seriously believe that one day when Christ returns that passages like this will be literally fulfilled. I believe that one day, when Christ returns to reign and he reorders all things, every aspect of creation will burst forth

into praise. Romans 8 says that the creation itself groans, like a woman in labor, anticipating the birth. One day, the day of days will be here. The redemption of the people of God is the occasion for even creation itself to join on wonder and praise. But, then, we are given 3 more reasons why there's no god like our God. There's no god like our God ...

7. Who finishes what he starts. – 44.24-28

A. **God started it.** (24)

This section begins with a common, but profound statement. "Thus says the LORD." This statement speaks to the heart of this entire book and gets right to the heart of us. For one, this is God who is speaking, not simply some wild-eyed guy named Isaiah. Therefore, what is said and recorded has ultimate authority. Now, you can choose to believe or reject this. But if you choose to reject, please understand what you are doing. You are rejecting that you believe that God is, and that he has actually revealed himself through the Bible. There is no middle ground here. The God who is, has spoken. And he has said that he is the Redeemer, and that he is the origin of life in the womb as well as all of life. He is the creator of creature and creation. It is all his. He started it and he will finish it. Even the verb tenses that Isaiah uses here speak of an action that is still in the future, but it is spoken of with the certainty as if it already happened.

B. **God finishes it.** (25-28)

These verses speak of God's precise and absolute governance over all. False prophets, false religions are simply that: false. These liars have no influence nor affect on what God has ordained. Most religion is an attempt to influence outcomes so that they are favorable to us. Therefore, there are all sorts of rituals that are followed in order to get the gods to favor us. God is not like the gods. God does what he has established as his will to be accomplished (25). God has promised that Jerusalem will not only be destroyed, but that it will be rebuilt (26). To Isaiah's audience, that meant, to buy stock in Lowe's.

But, this is more than a general promise of future blessing. God goes on record here and names the person who will be the agent of restoration. God says that a man named Cyrus will fulfill God's purpose. He will decree the rebuilding of Jerusalem and laying the foundation of a rebuilt temple. This man, will be such an agent of deliverance in the hands of God, that God calls him "my shepherd." Now, this verse (and the one that follows) really frustrates some liberal scholars who claim that there is no way that Isaiah could have known the actual name of the Persian emperor roughly 200 years before the guy rose to power. Therefore, some of them would say, that it really doesn't matter if Isaiah actually knew this ahead of time, all that matters, is that the editors of this book give us the impression that he did. Of course, in their way of thinking, there was no way he could, because, if that were the case, then this book would really be from God, which we all know that it isn't. But,

hold the phone. Isn't that the entire point of the text? God is saying, that I am God, there is no other and here I am going to prove it to you. Not only is God going on record to demonstrate that he has ordained the future and he controls the future, but God is also making it very clear to the Jews that he can rescue them any way he wants, even if it means using a foreigner.

8. Who determines the means and the end. – 45.1-13

A. **God ordains the details of life.** (45.1-8)

These 8 verses are actually a message from God to Cyrus. If calling Cyrus, "my shepherd" seemed to be a stretch, then calling him "his anointed" would be even more shocking. The point is clear. God has anointed Cyrus to carry out the plan that God has already determined for the deliverance of his people. When God says (3) "that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name" it is obvious that God literally calls him by his name. These verses bear out the fact that the military and political success of Cyrus, was all ordained by God and that God is putting this down on record so that Cyrus will know that God rules.

History bears this out. The Babylonian empire fell to the Medo-Persian Empire. Cyrus did indeed rise to power and became the emperor. Josephus, the most famous of all Jewish historians records a story in his works, Jewish Antiquities, that Cyrus was made aware of this account that predicted him by name and that he was so impressed with this, that he took this prediction seriously and did all that he could to fulfill it.

God's use of Cyrus in history was ultimately for the benefit of his people. (4) So, these verses are clear and rather overwhelming. God ordains all of the details of life to guarantee the care for his people. This is an OT expression of a NT promise.

Romans 8.28-30

Notice the three reasons that God gives for doing this: 1) so that Cyrus will know the LORD – v.3, 2) so that Israel may know that it is the LORD – v.4, and 3) so the world may know that God is God and that there is no other – v.6.

A natural question that arises from this is addressed in v.4 and 5. How can God ordain the details of life and yet people make their own decisions? Interestingly, God does not say how – does he? He says (4) "I name you, though you do not know me." (5) "I equip you, though you do not know me." In other words, you are not even aware of all that I am doing. God ordains all things, and yet we are fully responsible for the decisions that we make, but even the decisions that we make are under the absolute sovereignty of God. Do I understand that? NO! Do I have to understand that? No. If God wanted me to understand the how, he would have unpacked it. He doesn't. So, frankly, I do not worry about it. I honestly do not worry about it. God is sovereign, and man is responsible. So, while God mentions, but does not emphasize

the how, God DOES emphasize the WHO and the WHY. The Who is God. God is carrying out his plan whether or not his people know it. Over and over in this section we read where God says "I". God is laying claim to being the one and only God and he is also unapologetically stating the reasons why he does what he does. Everything that God does (6-7) including forming light, creating darkness, making well-being and creating calamity is so that people may know that there is no other God. He alone is God. Until you recognize the uniqueness of God and his absolute right to rule, you will never be rescued. Your salvation from the mess that you have made depends on you submitting yourself to God's rightful authority. Until you realize that only God can redeem you can you be redeemed. Why do people argue against and become so frustrated with these things that God states? We do, though don't we? But, God is not too complimentary to those who question the ways of God, is He?

B. And calls us to surrender. (45.9-13)

God has the right to choose whom he wants and use whom he wants to accomplish what he wants because God is the Creator and we are the creation. Who are we to call into question what he is doing? (9). If you don't like that, then go and create your own universe out of nothing, and let us know how that works out for you – ok? That is really the point. (12) But Isaiah is building up to something. Do you know what it is? Sure, he is anticipating those who argue with God's choice of Cyrus to rescue Judah (13). He should have done it differently! He should have not let us go into exile in the first place. (blah, blah, blah) But, there is more to it than that. Isaiah is about to reveal (52-53) that God is going to provide salvation for his people through a savior, who does not look like a savior. The savior who will come will suffer as the servant of God and will not look too impressive.

Jesus, as he really is, has never been too impressive to our world. In fact, Christianity, quite honestly, is not that impressive. People who have claimed to be followers, have tried to adorn it with enormous cathedrals, fancy clothes, solemn ceremonies, impressive organizations, and large events, but these things really do not matter. As Patrick made so clear a few weeks back, there are two ways to live. God's way and man's way. God's way ...

But God does not care whether the Redeemer looks impressive. God does not make decisions based on approval ratings. God maps out a plan for us to be rescued that is so comprehensive and so amazing that there is no way we could ever conceive of it, so we should restrain from sitting in judgment of God. We are so ignorant of all that God is up to, the intelligent response, is to acknowledge that God is God, and surrender our "rights" to him. Because, there is no god like our God.

We are going to stop here and tackle 45.14 – 46.13 next time because we have a lot, perhaps too much to digest. I want to close by focusing on one very, very obvious issue from this text, and that is the issue of inclusivism.

Our culture demands that we accept the idea that all ideas are equally valid, except, or course, the idea that all ideas are not equally valid. (But, hey – who wants to confuse the matter with some consistent rationality?) When we used to talk about being tolerant, we used to mean, being tolerant of people, even if we disagreed with their ideas or beliefs. For example, I have a neighbor who does not share my political views. Do I think that he is an idiot? No. He is my neighbor. Do I think that his views are just as valid as mine? No. I think that he is wrong, but I am not going to engage in any type of personal attack, nor anything that would distract from the gospel. That is how it should be. We are to be tolerant of people, even if we disagree with them. But, in our culture, that is not what tolerance is defined. Today, we are told that we have to be tolerant of other ideas. In fact, we are not allowed to judge other ideas and label them as wrong. All ideas are equally valid and equally true and if you do not believe that, then your intolerance is not tolerated.

This is no different today, than it was 2700 years ago. Judah then was drinking the cool-aid. They were coming to terms with what the rest of the world believed and were accepting of the world's views that it was highly presumptive and arrogant to insist that our God is the only god. Look at all of the other gods in the world. Every religion attempts to explain where we came from, how things work and how we can improve. What makes you think that yours is better? After all, it is all that you have known. You just need to admit that other expressions of faith, other lifestyles, are just as valid, and probably in some cases, even better than the narrow stream that you have been raised in. In fact, you need to admit that it is dangerous to believe that your way is the only way. But God is not tolerant of the lies of intolerance. Why? Only the true God can save.

“I am the first and the last; besides me there is no God.” (44.6)

“I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God. (45.5)

“I am the LORD, and there is no other.” (45.18)

“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me...” (46.9)

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14.6)

“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4.11-12)

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” (45.22)

If we were to soften the message in order to gain the respect of the world, we would only aid in their destruction. The most unloving thing we could do is to love ourselves so much that we want their approval. No, Judah's sin and our temptation is in not being forthright enough on the absolute, uncompromising, unchanging uniqueness of God. He stands alone and He defines himself, not us. He was before us. He created us. He defines us. We are accountable to him. But this awesome, righteous, infinite, holy, sovereign Creator is also rich in mercy. Our judge is also our Savior. If you do not turn to him, you have no hope.