

Sermon Notes & References
Knowing (the One) Who Holds the Future
Isaiah 41:21-29
November 14, 2010

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^A Isaiah 43:9
^B Jeremiah 10:5, Deuteronomy 7:26

^C Isaiah 44:28, 45:4; Jeremiah 50:3, 9
^D Ezra 1:2, Romans 8:28

A. Introduction

1. How to tell the weather – from a letter: —{2}.
 - a. Go to your back door and look for the dog.
 - (A) if the dog is at the door and wet, it's probably raining
 - (B) But if the dog is standing there really soaking wet, it is probably raining really hard.
 - (C) If the dog's fur looks like it's been rubbed the wrong way, it's probably windy.
 - (D) If the dog has snow on his back, it's probably snowing.
 - (E) Of course, to be able to tell the weather like this, you have to leave the dog outside all the time, especially if you expect bad weather. ... signed, sincerely, The Cat
 - b. a number of years ago, IBM developed a supercomputer – actually one computer running many CPU's so it was able to perform many computations at the same instant – its purpose wasn't for business, but to forecast the weather
 - c. people are still at it, using computers for weather forecasts
 - d. I have a tab on my computer that brings up 3 different forecasts for the Aurora area, each one covering today, tomorrow and longer weather outlooks
 - e. it's handy having three, because they seldom agree very closely, so I can pick the one I like best
 - f. actually, as most of you know, it's a mistake to use the weather forecast to plan anything of importance – or you will always be discouraged from setting out to do anything
2. this morning's text, our Scripture reading,
 - a. has to do with God's forecasting His people's future
 - b. the words are spoken by God through Isaiah at a time when Judah was still a kingdom
 - (A) the Assyrian armies
 - (1) had taken the northern nation of Israel into exile
 - (2) then had threatened Jerusalem with the same fate
 - (3) but had been rebuffed by the angel of God
 - (4) and departed, leaving the city unharmed
 - (B) king Hezekiah continued to reign over Judah

- (1) his life extended by 15 years
- (2) a righteous man and who sought to obey God
- (3) but his people were often of a different mind

c. God's people Israel

- (A) although descended from Abraham, His friend
- (B) although He had watched over them for centuries
- (C) although He had told them His plans for them
- (D) although He had made them His own special people
- (E) yet were unconcerned with Him
- (F) they wasted their trust on idols of air and emptiness
- (G) a people fickle in their commitment to God – at one moment trusting Him; at another seeking false gods

d. so God's words to Isaiah are addressed to the remnant of a Judah and an Israel of the future

- (A) when Judah, too, would be in exile in Babylon
- (B) joining Israel who preceded them by 150 years

e. living in an empire where false gods were on every hand

f. God's words are to keep them from trusting such gods

B. What Can the False Gods Do?

1. The Challenge — 21 'Present your case,' the Lord says. 'Bring forward your strong arguments,' The King of Jacob says. 22 Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; As for the former (or, first) events, declare what they were (or, be), That we may consider them and know their outcome. Or announce to us what is coming; 23 Declare the things that are going to come afterward, That we may know that you are gods; Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear (better, see) together.' 41:21-23

a. throughout this passage, the Lord argues His case before His people, based on His knowledge of the future

b. God issues a challenge to these so-called gods

- (A) He does not ask them to control the future as He can
- (B) but simply to tell what the future holds, to tell it truly

- c. the scene takes place in a court room
 - (A) the tone is echoes that in Isaiah 41:1-4, where
 - (1) God first asks the seaboard nations to the west,
 - (2) Who has brought the conqueror from the east?
 - (3) the one who will later be identified as Cyrus
 - (4) then God answers His own question: 'it is I, Myself'
 - (B) now God challenges the false gods; they are summoned
 - (1) to bring forth, **present your case** (v 21)
 - (2) to defend their claim to being gods
 - (3) to produce, **bring forth** (v 22) convincing evidence
 - (4) to marshal their strongest argument
- d. the challenge to these gods, in whom the nations trust, especially the nation of Babylon, is this in verse 22:
 - (A) Let them ... declare to us what is going to take place
 - (B) literally: let them cause what is going to happen to be conspicuous – in other words it must be clearly stated
 - (C) this is not to be some Delphic oracle, ambiguously stated, to be interpreted according to later events
- e. of these coming events, God gives leeway to the idols
 - (A) either '**as to the first events, declare what they be**', or, '**make conspicuous what is shortly coming**'
 - (1) they can select something from among the first of the future happenings, those that will soon happen
 - (2) in this case, we can '**consider them and know their outcome**' – we can wait, see, and shortly know whether or not what was foretold has taken place
 - (B) 22b Or announce to us what is coming; 23 Declare the things that are going to come afterward,
 - (1) if not the near future, then tell us the far future
 - (2) so that when it happens '**we may anxiously look about us and behold it together**'
 - (3) at that future date we shall be able to gaze, to look steadfastly upon it with wonder, and see it
 - (C) but, whatever, make your predictions
 - (D) make them for good or for evil; of blessing or disaster

(E) then we will admit you are really gods

2. The Result – 24 'Behold, you are of no account, And your work amounts to nothing; He who chooses you is an abomination.' — 41:24

a. the answer to this challenge is deafening silence

b. so God announces the verdict of the court

(A) the jury is in and the decision announced

(B) you idols are nothing; vanity; emptiness

(C) your works: non-existent, a part of never-never-land

c. and, as you idols are an abomination – as described in Deuteronomy 7:26 – so those who choose you idols over the One, True and Living God, are also an abomination

C. What Can the True God Do?

1. Control the Future – 25 'I have aroused one from the north, and he has come; From the rising of the sun he will call on My name; And he will come upon rulers as upon mortar, Even as the potter treads clay.' 41:25

a. the theme of verses 1 to 4 of the chapter is restated: God is going to bring a deliverer from the east, one to shepherd Israel back to its own land

(A) in Isaiah 44:28, his name, Cyrus, is foretold

(B) in Ezra 1:2, the fulfilment is recorded: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.'"

b. for the encouragement of His people in exile, God now tells that He will not forget nor forsake them

(A) Cyrus was a prince of Persia, a nation east of Babylon

(B) He may have also been related to the royal family of Media, a nation to the north; but in any case he first conquered Media and formed the Medo-Persian empire

(C) so in coming to deliver God's people from Babylon, he came from both the north and the east: only history could later show how accurate was God's forecast, that what looked like contradiction was in fact the truth

c. we spoke of the rapid conquest of Cyrus, how he sped across the lands all the way to the borders of European Greece, meeting little or no resistance, forming an empire that stretched from India in the east

to Greece and Egypt in the west, bordering the waters of the Caspian, Black, Mediterranean and Red Seas as well as the Persian gulf.

- d. so rulers became before him as mortar: as pavement to be trampled upon on this victorious marches
- e. and they had no more resistance to him than the clay can resist the working of the potter
- f. God's people can take assurance that He controls the future, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."
(Romans 8:28)

2. Declare the Future – 26 'Who has declared this from the beginning, that we might know? Or from former times, that we may say, "He is right!"? Surely there was no one who declared, Surely there was no one who proclaimed, Surely there was no one who heard your words. 27 Formerly I said to Zion, "Behold, here they are." And to Jerusalem, "I will give a messenger of good news.'" 41:26-27

- a. Some translations punctuate verse 26 as though it were Isaiah's prophetic account of the response of the faithful people of God in exile. I believe that they are the direct words of the Lord as in the context, using the plural 'we' of majesty, as used also in verse 22, and will so explain these words. But as the words are in either case inspired by God's Holy Spirit, they are just as fully true.
- b. have any of the false gods – Marduk of Babylon, or any other – foretold that this would happen?
- c. God searches the earth and can find none having done so
 - (A) He goes back to the beginning – there is no one that has spoken about this future coming of Cyrus
 - (B) there is no one who has to this point foretold this, upon whom God may put His stamp of approval
 - (C) three times He repeats, 'Surely there was no one'
- d. Only God can declare, proclaim, and tell the future
- e. and, for the sake of His people whom He loves, it is God who first tells them the good news, the gospel, of their coming salvation and deliverance
- f. through His messenger, Isaiah, His evangelical prophet

D. Evaluating the Alternatives – 28 'But when I look, there is no one, And there is no counsellor among them Who, if I ask, can give an answer. 29 Behold, all of them are false; Their works are worthless, Their molten images are wind and emptiness.' 41:28-29

1. so the conclusion is clear
 - a. God can and does know and control the future
 - b. and He does so on behalf of His own, special, chosen ones

2. but the idols of the nations
 - a. the gods of this world
 - b. all those who are set up in the place of the one, true God
 - c. who would claim our trust and
 - d. possess no counsel of worth, can give no answers to life
 - e. they are false; worthless; mere trash of wind and emptiness

E. Conclusion

1. people have a great deal of interest in the future
 - a. studying stock market forecasts hoping to make a profit
 - b. religiously reading the daily horoscope
 - c. even setting plans for the week by the weather forecast
 - d. but by trusting in these things, people are looking in all the wrong places and having all the wrong priorities

2. the Son of God was born on this earth as the man Jesus
 - a. Philippians 2:6-7 tells us that **5b "Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men."**
 - b. what all it entailed to empty Himself is far beyond our understanding, but in some way it involved His own knowledge for Jesus Himself said concerning his prophecy of future events, in Mark 13:32, **"But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."**
 - c. but we read that as Jesus faced every major event
 - (A) the start of His ministry
 - (B) the choosing of the twelve
 - (C) the final steps to the cross

(D) He spent time in prayer with His Father

(E) entrusting Himself, as the Son of Man, to the One who knows and controls the future

3. what about the future?

a. through faith in Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross

b. as our example Jesus did, we too can have a personal and intimate relationship with our Father in heaven

c. entrusting ourselves to the loving Father God who knows and controls the future for our best good

d. whatever the weather be, simply trusting each day in Him

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2. How to Tell the Weather, Kerux illustrations #24087