

Sermon Notes & References

Cyrus, God's Unwitting Servant  
Isaiah 44:24-45:7

April 3, 2011

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A. Introduction

1. Systematic Theology

- a. is an important study for any person who is called to teach God's word
  - (A) it is the systematic gathering of the truths taught in the Bible in an orderly fashion according to the subject
  - (B) it includes the facts about God as well as the facts about His works, and particularly His work as God the Son in bringing salvation, sanctification & glorification
  - (C) when a person is interviewed in the calling of a pastor or for ordination, it is these facts – the statement of faith of the person involved – that are questioned
  - (D) the purpose is to ensure that the person has an adequate grasp of God's word, that he can defend the truths of God's word, and that he uses God's word honestly and reliably
- b. because the ministry of God's word should be in accord with these facts of Scripture – the whole counsel of God
- c. but we must be sure that our theology does not limit God in His sovereignty, which has been defined in this fashion: 'God can do what he wants to do when he wants to do it without having to give an explanation for doing it' —{2}.

2. To the Jews there were only two groups, Israel and others

- a. according to their orthodox theology, and the promises found in Scripture, God's Messianic purposes would be accomplished through the seed of Abraham, through the people of Israel, through the throne of David
- b. Robert Ingersol was a vocal unbeliever and a colonel in the army in the nineteenth century. He was riding in the train with General Lew Wallace, then governor of New Mexico, also an unbeliever. Ingersol suggested to Wallace that he write a book that debunked the myths of Jesus. Wallace agreed that was something he should do one day. Later, for 6 years, he studied the life of Christ in preparation and by the reading of the Bible became a devout Christian. He then wrote his best-known book, Ben Hur. The 1959 movie falls short of the book whose subtitle is, 'A Story of the Christ'. —{3}.
- c. God used, not a Christian, nor a preacher, but the words of an atheist to start Lew Wallace on his

pilgrimage to God

d. in today's passage, Isaiah foretells that God will use a man named Cyrus, as a messiah and shepherd to deliver Israel – and the surprise would be – Cyrus was to be a pagan!

B. The Redeemer-God is Known by His Doings

44:24-27

1. in Dealing with His People

- a. "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, ..." (v 24a) – God describes his dealing with His people with two action words
- b. He is the one redeeming them – the one paying the price to deliver them out of bondage – this is the predominant work of God – in theology all the works of God move toward one grand work, the victorious work of the cross
- c. He is the one birthing them – true in the natural sense of man, in the national sense of Israel, and in the spiritual sense of the new birth by the Holy Spirit in the NT
- d. He deals with His people as Saviour and Redeemer

2. in Creating All Things

- a. "... I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself And spreading out the earth all alone," (v 24b) – again three action words – God a God of action
- b. making all – 'things' added by translators – the extent of His doing is unlimited – He has done all things well
- c. stretching out, spreading (or stamping) out – words that reflect back to the bringing of the universe into existence
- d. His creation manifests His power and glory

3. in Controlling History

- a. "Causing the omens of boasters to fail, Making fools out of diviners, Causing wise men to draw back And turning their knowledge into foolishness," (v 25)
- b. man has long desired to know the future and to that end has produced all sorts of omens – crystal balls, birds in flight, Ouija boards, horoscopes – to find it out
- c. others, less openly superstitious call upon reason – trends, statistics, analyses – the work of man's

wisdom

d. but while man proposes, God disposes, and the emptiness of their efforts becomes apparent – just as do the 14-day forecasts on the weather network!

4. in Foreordaining the Future

a. "Confirming the word of His servant And performing the purpose of His messengers. It is I who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited!' And of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built.' And I will raise up her ruins again." (v 26)

b. God knows the future

(A) He has foretold it in the word spoken by Isaiah

(B) He has sent prophets to make known His purpose

c. and He confirms their words by bringing it to pass

(A) there is still well over a century before the people of Jerusalem and Judah go into captivity, before their cities are destroyed and laid waste

(B) but He already has His plan to restore cities and people

5. in Providing Redemption

a. "27 It is I who says to the depth of the sea, 'Be dried up!' And I will make your rivers dry. 28b ... And he (just who he is we will see in a moment) declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" (vv 27-28)

b. echoing back to the delivery of Israel out of Egypt

c. that He, the God of Israel, Yahweh, who effected that delivery, casually drying up the floor-bed of the Red Sea

d. will likewise deliver them out of Babylon in the future

e. these are all the doings of the one True God – our God!

C. The Redeemer-God Acts Sovereignly

44:28-45:7

1. in His Sovereign Choice of Instruments

a. "28 It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" 45:1 Thus says the Lord

to Cyrus His anointed, ..." (28, 1a)

- b. both secular and Biblical history give a kind treatment of Cyrus' character
  - (A) as its being noble rather than despotic all-absorbing selfishness of other such conquerors
  - (B) as admitting the power of Israel's God and giving the decree (Ezra 1) the enabled their return to their land
  - (C) but while he may even have read this prophecy of Isaiah – the Jewish historian, Josephus, says that he did – in the Cyrus Cylinder he attributes his victories also to Marduk, god of Babylon
  - (D) Cyrus was an enlightened pagan, but still a pagan
- c. yet look at the title and honours given to Cyrus by God
  - (A) He is My shepherd – God was and is the Shepherd of His people – and to Cyrus he accords the honour of working with and under Himself to gather God's flock and to return them to their own pastures – to carry out the desires of God: rebuilding the city, the temple
  - (B) He is God's anointed – He is God's Messiah – once before God had anointed a pagan king – Hazael of Syria – to punish His people; Cyrus he anoints to be the deliverer and saviour of His people
  - (C) from this we catch a glimpse of ...

## 2. in His Sovereign Way of Working

- a. in His relationship to Cyrus – God describes him as "Whom I have taken by the right hand, ..." (v 1b)
  - (A) God takes a personal part in Cyrus' campaigns
  - (B) he joins hands with Cyrus to bring success, thus
- b. in Fighting for Cyrus – "1b ... And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: 2 I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars." (vv 1c, 2) – Edward J. Young says
  - (A) To the world, it would seem that Cyrus was a mighty conqueror, wise in the ways of warfare; but whereas this may have been the case, the ultimate reason for his victories was that God was carrying out His purposes of redemption. It was His will that His people should return from Babylon to Palestine and that there the Christ should be born.<sup>{4}</sup>.
  - (B) he will ungird Cyrus' enemies of weapon and armour so that they are incapable of withstanding him
  - (C) as God had fought for Israel in their entering into the land of promise, so He fights on behalf of Cyrus

- c. in Enriching and Blessing Cyrus – “I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, ...” (v 3a) – not evil, but treasures in dark, secret places
  - (A) oh, yes, our theology can see God blessing His own
  - (B) but here he blesses and enriches Cyrus; Brerewood, a 16th century mathematician, estimated the wealth he obtain by conquering Croesus king of Lydia, as being £126 million (at least \$13 billion at today’s prices)
- d. in Making Himself Known to Cyrus – “... So that you may know that it is I, The Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.” (v 3b)
  - (A) by calling Cyrus by name, by giving Him success
  - (B) God reveals Himself to the pagan Cyrus
  - (C) so that Cyrus may not fall into Nebuchadnezzar’s error and congratulate himself on his achievements

### 3. in His Sovereign Purposes

- a. we have already covered one of God’s sovereign purposes in His choice and use of Cyrus, that this pagan ruler might know that his conquests came from God; but there’s more
- b. His sovereign purpose for His people – “For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honour Though you have not known Me.” (v 4)
  - (A) this pagan is called by His name, Cyrus
  - (B) he is given honour to be God’s shepherd and messiah
  - (C) but not for Cyrus’ own sake, but for the sake of the people of God; that, as we said they may return to their land where the ultimate Messiah, the Christ is to be born, in order to go to the cross and save His people from a greater bondage than that of Babylon, to save man from the bondage of sin; all this is
- c. His sovereign purpose for His own honour – “I am the Lord, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me;” (v 5)
  - (A) Cyrus who is foretold at this time many years before his birth, was a pagan from an unbelieving people; both he and his nation were without God
  - (B) yet God chose to use Him this way for His own glory

- d. His sovereign purpose for man's salvation – "That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other," (v 6)
  - (A) and this confirms the true purpose of Cyrus' mission
  - (B) it goes beyond the nation of Israel
  - (C) and forms the gospel commission to all mankind

4. in His Sovereign Rule of the Universe

- a. "The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these." (v 7)
- b. despite the existence of sin, sorrow, sickness and such
- c. God is not the author of sin, but they exist by His will, so that 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.'
- d. this universe is under God's sovereign rule; that is one of the messages and purposes of the book of Revelation
- e. today this is hidden, but one day it will be revealed when all will confess Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father

D. Conclusion

- 1. our purpose this morning is to show just how great God is
  - a. we cannot confine him to our own little minds and ideas
  - b. that we might, in the words of Jesus' prayer, know Him as the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent
  - c. a knowledge that Jesus say is the essence of eternal life
  - d. a knowledge that only comes through obedient faith
- 2. our closing Hymn is 'Master let me walk with thee'
  - a. as we sing, remember that 'Master' is not just a nice title
  - b. it is part of our confession that He is sovereign Lord of all

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
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2. Pastor Roger Ellsworth as a breakfast meeting – Kerux illustration #17291
3. From ‘The Making of Ben Hur’ – Kerux illustration #452
4. EJY – *in loc*