

Isaiah Part 27: “Turn to me and be saved...”

Isaiah 45

Cyrus, God’s instrument (Isaiah 45 v 1 to 13)

“Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus” (v 1) – Isaiah carries on this remarkable prophecy from the previous chapter. God announces by name the deliverer for his people from a coming captivity, and he does this some 200 years before Cyrus was born! “Whose right hand I have grasped” – Cyrus could look back on his life and career and see how God had held his hand the entire time.

- What do these verses tell us about Cyrus – what God will do for him and through him? What assurance does such a passage give us? In verses 9 to 13, how does God answer those who question God’s purposes and ways? See Romans 9 v 20.

“To subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings” (v 1) – according to a historical commentator: ‘Xenophon, in his first book... gives us a list of them. Cyrus subdued... the Syrians, Assyrians, Arabians, Cappodcians, Phrygians, the Lydians, Carians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, the Bactrians, Indians, Cilicians, Sacians, Paphloagonians, Maryandines, and many other nations. He also had dominion over the Asiatics, Greeks, Cyprians, Egyptians...’

“To open doors before him that gates may not be closed” – the armies of the Medes and Persians, under Cyrus the Great, conquered the city of Babylon in a remarkable raid described in Daniel Chapter 5. According to the ancient historian Herodotus, while King Belshazzar held a reckless party, Cyrus conquered the city by diverting the flow of the Euphrates into a nearby swamp, thus lowering the level of the river so that his troops could march through the water and under the river-gates. But they still would not have been able to enter, had not the bronze gates of the inner walls been left inexplicably unlocked. God opened the gates of Babylon for Cyrus, and put this in writing some 200 years before it happened!

“I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places” (v 3) – the night they conquered the city, Cyrus and his armies took all the treasures of Babylon. The Roman historian Pliny wrote: ‘*When Cyrus conquered Asia, he found thirty-four thousand pounds weight of gold, besides golden vessels and articles in gold.*’ “That you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name” – God announced this in advance so that Cyrus would know and glorify the LORD, and so that Cyrus would show kindness to the people of God, granting them permission to return to the Promised Land from the captivity imposed on them by the Babylonians. Cyrus’ proclamations fulfilling this prophecy are recorded in Ezra 1 v 1 to 4, and 2 Chronicles 36 v 22, 23.

“I name you, though you do not know me... I equip you, though you do not know me” (v 4, 5) – Cyrus didn’t even know the LORD, yet God could anoint him, equip him, and use him. How much more will God be able to do through those who have at least a mustard seed’s worth of faith in him! God can work in and through others in very unexpected ways (Proverbs 21 v 2). “I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things” (v 7) – simply put, Isaiah knows, Cyrus would know and declare to the whole world, and we should know today – that God is in control!

“Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit” (v 8) – God can speak to the heavens and bring rain. It is true in the literal, natural sense; but it is also true in a *spiritual* sense. God can send a flood from heaven, and let the skies pour down righteousness. It is important to see that salvation and righteousness bear fruit *together*.

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“Woe to him who strives with him who formed him” (v 9) – knowing that God is the Creator of all things should make us hesitant to oppose him in any way. It is as foolish as for the clay to say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ Since God made us, he knows what is best for us. “Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’” (v 10) – it is simply foolish for us to question God over how he made us. All of us have strengths and weaknesses, triumphs and challenges. We simply need to accept what we are before God and look for his redeeming, transforming power to conform us to the image of his Son (Romans 8 v 29).

“I made the earth and created man on it” (v 12) – repeatedly through this section of Isaiah, God emphasises his role as Creator. The importance of this idea shows us that knowing God as Creator isn’t an option, or a matter of text-book fights in the courts and public schools. When we reject God as Creator, we reject the God of the Bible, and serve a God of our own imagination. He really did make us, and it really does matter.

“He shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward” (v 13) – the God of all power and creation uses that power on behalf of his people. He will direct the ways of the announced deliverer, Cyrus, and cause him to rebuild Jerusalem and release God’s people. And Cyrus will do it ‘not for price or reward’, but out of a conviction from God that he must do it!

The LORD, the only Saviour (Isaiah 45 v 14 to 25)

“They shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will plead with you, saying: ‘Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no god besides him’” (v 14) – even as Israel was led away in the captivity of a forced relocation, so one day Israel will be supreme among the nations, and will lead them as they and the LORD please. The submission of the nations is not so much to Israel itself, as it is to the God of Israel.

“Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour” (v 15) – here Isaiah pours out an inspired flood of praise, exalting God – similar to Paul’s outpouring of praise in 1 Timothy 1 v 17.

- What reasons are given for the people of all nations to turn from idols to the worship of the one true God? How does this anticipate the universal scope of Christ’s redemption (Romans 1 v 16)?

“I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in vain’” (v 19) – when we seek God with all our hearts, we will find him (Jeremiah 29 v 13; Hebrews 11 v 6). “A righteous God and a Saviour; there is none besides me” (v 21) – at first glance, it is impossible to see how a righteous God can be a Saviour when justice demands that sinners be condemned. But through his great love, God fulfilled the righteous demands of his justice through Jesus at the Cross, so he could be our Saviour, yet still remain a righteous God (Romans 3 v 26).

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!” (v 22) – this simple but powerful statement shows the plan of salvation: (i) it shows the *simplicity* of salvation: all we must do is turn; (ii) it shows the *focus* of salvation: we must turn to God, and never to ourselves or to anyone or anything else; (iii) it shows the *love* behind salvation: God pleads with us, ‘Turn to me’; (iv) it shows the *assurance* of salvation: ‘and be saved’; (v) it shows the *extent* of God’s saving love: ‘all the ends of the earth!’

“To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance” (v 23) – God declares there will come a day when every knee shall bow to him, and every tongue will swear allegiance to him. Paul quoted this passage in Philippians 2 v 9 to 11. “Only in the LORD... are righteousness and strength” (v 24) – this is the declaration of every believer. Righteousness and strength are found in the LORD, not in ourselves or in anyone else. Indeed, “in the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory!” (v 25).

Prayer – Lord, again we marvel and wonder when we think of your glory and power, your authority over all people and nations, and over all of creation. Thank you for the simplicity of salvation, that we are simply to turn to you and be saved, and that this invitation is to all people, from the ends of the earth. Help us to remember that in you are righteousness and strength, and that to you every knee shall bow and every tongue swear allegiance. We praise you for these wonderful truths, in Jesus’ name, Amen.