

## Is God Sleeping on the Job?

Isaiah 45:1–7

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,  
 whose right hand I have grasped,  
 to subdue nations before him  
 and to loose the belts of kings,  
 to open doors before him  
 that gates may not be closed:

<sup>2</sup>“I will go before you

and level the exalted places,<sup>[a]</sup>

I will break in pieces the doors of bronze  
 and cut through the bars of iron,

<sup>3</sup>I will give you the treasures of darkness  
 and the hoards in secret places,

that you may know that it is I, the LORD,  
 the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

<sup>4</sup>For the sake of my servant Jacob,  
 and Israel my chosen,

I call you by your name,

I name you, though you do not know me.

<sup>5</sup>I am the LORD, and there is no other,  
 besides me there is no God;

I equip you, though you do not know me,

<sup>6</sup>that people may know, from the rising of the sun  
 and from the west, that there is none besides  
 me;

I am the LORD, and there is no other.

<sup>7</sup>I form light and create darkness;

I make well-being and create calamity;

I am the LORD, who does all these things.

From where we sit, with our doubting hearts, it doesn't seem like a big stretch to look at the world and all of humanity's selfish intentions and conclude that evil has a shot at winning the day. We watch in horror as radical Islamic terrorists and self-absorbed lunatics with assault weapons attack people in their workplace, or in public, and mercilessly slaughter them in the name of something they believe. It's not only wicked and deranged; it's terribly unfair! It causes us to begin to believe that evil has a good shot at triumphing.

There always exists the idea that reality consists of a continuous duel between good and evil, each having equal power. It entices us to adopt a sort of yin-and-yang method to life, suggesting that there will always be a balance between these two opposing forces.

Take heart and be encouraged, because the Holy Scriptures tell us in very clear and certain terms that this is not the case. And one of many examples that brings us peace is the prophesy of Isaiah as he predicted the rise of King Cyrus of the Persian Empire. In that prophesy, we discover that all that evil musters against God is no competition for the Holy Trinity's intent to build on his righteousness.

Isaiah proclaims that Jehovah uses someone for his divine purpose even when that individual does not acknowledge him as the one true God. In other words, our Father in heaven takes all that evil and rejection unleashed against his righteousness and makes it submit to his divine purpose. Even when it looks the worst,

How would you feel, knowing this to be true? In our Old Testament reading, God calls Cyrus, King of Persia, “his anointed” one: “Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed” (v 1).

Now this is surprising, maybe even shocking, because Cyrus is not a king of God's people; he's not even a man of faith. He's a pagan. He's the ruler of a foreign empire who will come to rule over God's people only because he's a conqueror. Our text says twice, “you do not know me”. Cyrus did not know, and did not believe in, the true God. And yet God says, “I call you by your name, I name you”. God even calls Cyrus “anointed.” That's the title given to the Messiah, the Christ! Yes -- Pagan Cyrus sharing the same title as Jesus?!

So what's the Lord got to do with Cyrus? Well, “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name”.

The Lord would subdue nations before Cyrus, enable him to conquer foreign powers—even mighty Babylon -- almost as if the gates of walled cities would just swing open for his army to march in. And Cyrus would collect the plunder, the wealth of all his enemies. And so it happened. History clearly records that the Persian Empire

conquered lands with unprecedented speed and ease. Even Babylon fell, almost without a fight.

What's God doing here? Why does he give such success to evil, to unbelievers? That's the same question we often ask ourselves about our own world, isn't it?

Even closer to home, we see evil seeming to triumph right in our own schools, on our own jobsites, among our own circles -- people we counted as friends.

So what has God been up to? Is he sleeping on the job? Cyrus leads the Persians to defeat the empire of Babylon. For what reason did God direct this history? Low and behold, we read: "For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen". Jehovah pours out his grace upon his chosen Israel through this conquest and through an unholy nation that does not acknowledge the one true God, though Cyrus had other motives for his conquests. How did God use this conquest? After seventy years of Babylonian captivity, the fall of Babylon destroyed the captors. And among Cyrus's very early decrees after his greatest victory is the announcement that the Jews can go home! God uses Cyrus to return his chosen people back to their homes and worship.

Throughout the Bible, there are examples like this. God makes it abundantly clear that in the midst of evil carrying out its diabolical plans, tempting you as a Christian to believe that hope is lost and God is no longer in control, the Lord has in no way lost his hold. The promise he has made to you in your Baptism is still sure—that you are his and he is governing all things for your benefit. While Holy Scripture makes it clear that evil is judged by the righteousness of God, it goes even further, assuring you that evil **MUST** submit to God's will.

There are many examples, but let's focus now on what Judah's return from exile set up in history—history that God steps into, intervenes in, and guides. It is the arrival of another "anointed" and chosen King, to do the will of the Father.

This one, unlike Cyrus, submitted perfectly to the Father's will. Look at the evil that came upon this, the Son of God! How about Satan himself in the wilderness; Judas who betrayed him; Caiaphas who sent him to Pontus Pilate with false charges; the crowd that called out for his crucifixion; the

Roman soldiers who mocked him, beat him, and nailed him to a cross? Look at what evil does. Look at how it appears as if God is out of control, leaving evil to succeed in snuffing out the divine intentions of God.

That is -- until you hear the words of Jesus call out to his Father to forgive them. And then you marvel at the acknowledgment of Jesus that his Father chose to forsake him. And you marvel even more to find out that the condemnation of Jesus the Christ, the begotten Son of the Father, whom he loved, was the very purpose of his being chosen—for the evil **IN YOU** to be forgiven. Do you see that even the evil in you is defeated by the power of God?

And low and behold, we find the pinnacle of how God makes evil's intentions bow down to his will for his righteousness to be yours. Righteousness is yours now, even as evil continues to raise its ugly head. It has no hope to change what God has accomplished for you!

May you rest in the assurance that God uses those like Cyrus and others for his purpose: "I equip you, [Cyrus,] though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things".

May you rest in spite of what still goes on all around you in this world of wickedness. Rest in knowing that none of it will change what God has done for your eternity in his kingdom. Rest in knowing that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39). For he even uses those who do not acknowledge him for his will and purpose. Amen.

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