

Isaiah 45:1-7 - “God’s Control Over Evil”

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We come here today sorry for all the ways we have acted this past week as if we don’t believe that God, our Savior, is in control of all things, and desperate not only for God’s forgiveness (which He assured us of in the Absolution), but also for God to mercifully rule and guide our lives so that we can today and in the future **“pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal”** (as we prayed earlier, in one of my favorite Collects. Repeat). One of the ways God answers this prayer is through His Word in today’s readings, whereby He creates and/or strengthens our faith in His promises.

In our readings God reminds us that whether it was *“the spiritual forces of evil”* (Ephesians 6:12) at work in the Pharisees to entangle and destroy Jesus (which we were reminded of in our Gospel reading), or the *“the spiritual forces of evil”* at work in Cyrus (the pagan ruler of Persia, pictured on the front of our bulletin, and mentioned in our OT reading), or *“the spiritual forces of evil”* at work in our lives to cause so many troubles in our lives and the lives of our loved ones, the good news is that our loving, merciful, and all powerful God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is in control of it all, including *“the spiritual forces of evil”*! While God is not the author of evil, just as He is not the one we can blame for our sinful behavior this past week, He is in control of all evil. And when God is in control of all things, including evil, it’s ultimately for our eternal good.

Consider Cyrus, the ancient pagan ruler of Persia, which was in the area of Iran. Even though we’re told in our text that Cyrus didn’t *“know”* the God of Israel (which means that Cyrus, while he knew of God, he didn’t believe in Him or worship Him as the only true God), that didn’t stop God from working through Cyrus for the good of God’s people. God *“anointed”* Cyrus, or set him apart to *“break in pieces the doors of bronze.”*

The *“doors of bronze”* speaks of the one hundred bronze doors or gates Nebuchadnezzar erected within the wall surrounding Babylon. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus tells us that the outermost wall surrounding Babylon was eleven feet thick, followed by another wall that was twenty-one feet thick. There were also three-hundred and sixty watchtowers built within the wall, every sixty to sixty-five feet. The tallest watchtower was three hundred feet high. There was also a moat system in front of the outer wall. Together, these things made Babylon the most fortified city in the world at that time, which appeared to make it impossible to break into or out of. But Babylon was no match for God, who chose to work through Cyrus the pagan ruler of Persia to overpower the pagan nation of Babylon and set God’s people free.

But there’s even more good news to think about when it come to God delivering His people through Cyrus. Since Cyrus wasn’t a true believer in the God of Israel, *“the spiritual forces of evil”* were in control of Cyrus’ heart/faith. Therefore, by using Cyrus to defeat the Babylonians (who were also being controlled by *“the spiritual forces of evil”*), God was showing us, and all people, that nothing, including evil, was outside of His control. And when God’s in control of everything (even evil), it’s for our good.

Let me give you another example. When “*the spiritual forces of evil*” were working through the Pharaoh of Egypt to try and destroy God’s people, the Pharaoh told the midwives to kill all the newborn boys of Israel. When they failed to do what the Pharaoh told them, he “*commanded all his people, ‘Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile’*” (Exodus 1:22)—to drown them. So, what does God do? He turns the enemies evil plan back onto the enemy in order to set God’s people free. He “*cast*” them in the water of the Red Sea—He drowns them.

Who’s in control of everything (even evil) for our good? God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

One final example. The greatest plan Satan devised to destroy God’s people was to gain control of Adam and Eve’s lives through sin, which led to God’s condemnation of mankind—a damning death for us all. So what did God do to turn the enemies evil plan back onto the enemy in order to set God’s people free? The Word of God became flesh and blood in Jesus Christ so that He could take all of our sins upon Himself, resulting in His damning death on behalf of all mankind. Then He rose from the dead in victory over our sins, death and all “*the spiritual forces of evil*” in order to give us saving faith in this good news! God used the devil’s weapons of sin and death to destroy sin, death and the devil. How about that when it comes to turning the enemies evil back onto the enemy in order to set God’s people free!

In conclusion, where do we go with all the evil things we have done, with the evil things that other people do to us, and/or with all the troubles we often experience as a result of living in this fallen world? Our Lord invites us to come to Him, who’s in control of all things for our eternal good!

[Children’s Sermon] Have you ever drawn straws for something? Here’s how it works. I have a bunch of straws in my hand. Some of them are long and some of them are short. If you draw a long straw, you win a prize. If you draw a short straw you don’t win a prize. [Let each child draw a straw.]

Those who drew a long straw, you’ll get a prize. Those who drew a short straw, you don’t get a prize. Some people call that “the luck of the draw,” since you’re not in control of whether you win or lose.

But the truth is, when God is in control of all things, there’s no such thing as luck. When something good or bad happens to us, who’s in control of these good or bad things? Good luck, bad luck, or God? God! Luck is just an idea that people who don’t believe in God made up to explain why some things happen to us.

So, who’s in control of all the things that happen in our lives, good luck, bad luck, or God? God! And God says that those who drew a long straw get a prize, and those who drew a short straw get a prize, because these straws or luck are not in control, I am. And I sent my Son to become a man in Jesus Christ so that He could set you free from your sins and death through His death and resurrection, thus making you all winners and giving you the prize of eternal life in paradise with me.

So, when something good happens to us, we don’t thank our lucky stars, we thank God. And when something bad happens we don’t pray to the imaginary god of luck, that our luck would change. Instead we pray to Jesus, our crucified and risen Savior, who showed us that He’s in control of all things, and working through all things (good and bad) for our good. Therefore we pray that God would strengthen our faith in this good news that we may live in peace during both good times and bad.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.