**The Servant King**

Isaiah 45:1-8

Look back at chapter 44:

“I am the LORD… who confirms the word of his servant… who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and he shall fulfill all my purpose.’” Isaiah 44:24,26,28

God called His people to **stand up as WITNESSES for Him** - testifying before the nations that He is the One True God and there is no other. And ***the Lord gave them evidence*** to help make their case. Specifically, God gave them detailed predictions, way ahead of time, to make it clear that everything that happened was according to His sovereign plan. In fact, God challenged other nations to make comparable predictions, ***He challenged other gods***, like a boxer before a prize fight boasting of His ability compared to theirs; or like Babe Ruth pointing his bat at the bleachers and predicting his home run.

***Isaiah gets pretty sarcastic on this topic*** - “Come on, you idols - let’s see it, you ‘gods,’ - **make a prediction**, something, anything - predict the color of the sunrise or the next time it will rain - show us that you have some knowledge that you have some power… but you know you don’t. You idols can’t speak, you can’t move, you can’t do anything at all.”

By contrast, the Lord, the God of Israel, makes hundreds and hundreds of detailed predictions like this one - **naming Cyrus as the ruler** who would come and enable the exiled Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem and their temple.

Do you see the significance of this? ***It proves that the exile and the destruction of Jerusalem were not failures of God***, they were predetermined and predicted events by God - proven by documented prophecies like this one.

Now, **secular and liberal scholars discount prophecies like this** by saying that the historical Isaiah didn’t actually say them or write them - but they were added later by another writer or another scribe. There is no reason to believe in such a later writer or editor - Isaiah is always presented intact in the ancient manuscripts, including the Great Isaiah scroll found at Qumran 200 years before Jesus.



The truth is that the actual Isaiah who spoke and wrote all of these words lived ***at least 142 years before Cyrus and the Persians conquered Babylon*** and issued his decree allowing the Jewish exiles to begin their return to Israel. Assyria was still the regional power and Babylon would rise a couple of decades later. No one could have expected or predicted the Persian conquest much less named the Persian King who would help Israel in these specific ways.

***But that is PRECISELY what happened in history.*** Cyrus the second, or Cyrus the Great, implemented a new and unusual policy very different from Assyria and Babylon that showed their power by taking slaves away from their homeland. ***Cyrus was very pragmatic.*** He figured that all of these captive nations had gods they worshiped and if he let them go home they would pray to their gods FOR HIM and things would therefore go better for him and his empire.

But the point here in Isaiah is that ***this polytheistic Persian King was actually being led by the God of Israel and was actually the servant of the Lord.*** He bore the title of “King” and the Persian Empire became the most extensive empire of ancient times - the one that inspired Alexander the Great, in fact - but Cyrus was not the real king in this scenario, he was serving the true King, the God of Israel. Look at chapter 45 again:

“Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him…” Isaiah 45:1

***This is the only time a non-Jew is called God’s Anointed*** - or Messiah. Saul was the first anointed king of Israel. David was the anointed king, the great king foreshadowing Jesus the ultimate Messiah. But the same word for Messiah is used here of Cyrus the Great, the King of Persia. **Cyrus was the Servant King**. He was appointed and anointed to serve God and His people. And he did - to great effect.

This is a remarkable and significant truth for us to understand. ***God can and does use all kinds of people***, from all kinds of backgrounds, to serve His purposes. God doesn’t just use Christians any more than in ancient times He only used Jews. That doesn’t mean that Cyrus was “saved” or a true believer or that God using a non-believer today means they are saved or will be in heaven with us. This falls under **the heading of COMMON GRACE** - that God shows His love to all people by creating, appointing and empowering specific leaders and servants to accomplish specific tasks.

We’ve all experienced this in many ways:

* **Your doctor** may or may not be a Christian, but if that doctor is skilled in a discipline you need, you should thank GOD for providing that doctor for you at that time. That person is the servant of the Lord to you whether they know it or not.
* Your child may have **a teacher** who is not a believer in Jesus, but who is an excellent teacher of math or history or science. She may not give glory to God for her training and skills, but YOU SHOULD. God made her and equipped her to be a blessing to you and your family.
* Plumbers, electricians, AC repair guys, car mechanics, nurses, administrators, cashiers, cooks and food servers - ***these are all expressions of the limitless goodness and grace of God to bless the whole world.***

We will see **three ways God prepares and uses people** to accomplish His purposes with Cyrus as our example.

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

1. **Calling** them by name

“For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by name, I name you, though you do not know me.” Isaiah 45:4

This verse makes it clear that ***it’s Cyrus being talked about*** - he did not even know the Lord, the God of Israel. And, of course, at the time of the prophecy Cyrus didn’t even exist. But God appointed this specific man to become the king of Persia and to perform some definite tasks for the sake of Israel, that also benefited many other nations in the region.

Notice that God not only calls Cyrus by name - but ***God GIVES HIM that name***. “I name you.”

Now, this should be very ***encouraging for all of us in terms of the work God has called us to do***. God named you before time, He designed you and then called you by name - summoning you to the work that He prepared in advance for you to do. Look at verse 13:

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“I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free.” Isaiah 45:13

***God created Cyrus*** to be a powerful leader, giving him natural abilities to communicate and plan and special gifting to influence other people. Then God called Cyrus into public service, mainly through his family of origin, since his grandfather was also a king named Cyrus. But **this is not DEISM** where God just winds up the clock and then lets it go however it will. This is God’s sovereign orchestration of all things, God’s detailed guidance of history. God is the one who STIRRED UP CYRUS in righteousness. God gave this Persian King a sensitive conscience and an awareness of the needs and concerns of others.

And let’s be realistic about history - ***most kings are not wired that way***. Most kings are about their own desires, their own name, their own people. But Cyrus was different. He departed from common practice in his day and chose to let all captive people go back to their homeland. FOR FREE!

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“He shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward.” Isaiah 45:13

In other words, ***it wasn’t because the Jews paid a huge tribute*** - emptying out their treasury of gold and silver, that Cyrus let them come back. That’s how it usually worked. You want the favor of a nearby king - you pay him off. But Cyrus let the Jews come back FOR FREE. Again - unheard of. This was a gentile ruler being stirred up by God Himself to serve God’s people and help them rebuild their fallen city.

***How is God stirring YOU UP lately in righteousness?*** How is the Lord speaking to your heart and leading you in concern for otheres? He created and called you and He convicts every one of us and guides us to specific ministry opportunities - but we have to say yes, we have to move forward and DO the things He is stirring us up to do. And it’s not for us to QUESTION HIM. Look at verse 9.

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

1. **Calling** them by name

“Woe to him who strives with him who formed him… Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’” Isaiah 45:9

Isaiah’s funny right? ***What a picture!*** A lump of clay suddenly forming a mouth and sassing back at the potter - “Hey, dude - what are you DOING? I don’t want to be an ashtray! I want to be a Chinese VAAS - note a vase, a VAAS.”

***The clay keeps talking back*** - “Hey, Potter! Your work has no handles!” What kind of pot am I without handles?

The point is - don’t question the way God made you. He is the Potter. We are the clay. If God wants to make you into a person of great influence and international prestige - that’s his prerogative. If God wants to make you a minimum wage laborer or a behind the scenes administrator - ***who are you to question His plan and His will?***

God created you, called you and stirred you up - just as He does for the people around you - even non-believers. Of course, not everyone cooperates with this. God is never responsible for the evil choices of tyrannical kings or grumpy Walmart workers. They make their own choices. But God IS responsible for every good thing that anyone does anywhere. It is a wonderful gift of His common grace to all people everywhere. He appoints and anoints people to do His work. Second:

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

1. **Equipping** them for specific work

“I am the LORD, and there is no other… I equip you, though you do not know me.” Isaiah 45:5

God not only created and called Cyrus, ***God gave him everything he would need to set the Jews free*** and bring them back to their land. If Cyrus had just been a Persian shepherd, he would not have been able to issue an edict releasing the Jews from Babylon. I suppose he could have written and sent out an edict, but most likely no one would have listened to a random shepherd out in the wilderness.

***But God positioned Cyrus in his family line and timed his rise to power*** for when the Persian Empire was reaching its heights of power. So when Cyrus issued that edict it carried the full weight of the entire Persian Empire with all of the military force with which they had conquered the mighty Babylonians. God equipped Cyrus, anointing him for specific work:

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“Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him…” Isaiah 45:1

God promised to go before this king, toppling powerful nations, conquering other kings, opening doors and knocking down gates. How did God accomplish this? Did the Lord thunder from heaven and cast down hailstones and lightning? Not this time. In this case God simply enabled Cyrus to build a powerful military. And through that army:

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

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“I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze…” Isaiah 45:2

God equipped Cyrus with military power, with wealth and influence, with wisdom and strength to build a massive Empire. What exalted places were brought down? Babylon for one. Cyrus’ son would conquer Egypt, also as foretold by Isaiah in v. 14.

This is not a surprising idea for us who know the Bible. We know Romans 13 that:

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

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“There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” Romans 13:1

***God ordained human government as a means of restraining evil and rewarding good.*** Does that mean that all governments are good? Of course not. But in general, rulers and kings are in place to punish those who break the law and enforce some kind of justice.

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

1. **Equipping** them for specific work

“He does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.” Romans 13:4

If you think the US government is bad news, try going to Haiti now or the Sudan. As bad as government is - think of nearby communist nations - having a government is almost always better than not having one. I like Winston Churchill’s line about democracy - “Democracy is the worst form of government - except for all the others.”

The point is to **be thankful for the government leaders** God has appointed and anointed to serve us. Our Mayor Jane Castor has a huge task in leading the great city of Tampa. Our Governor Ron Desantis is not only responsible for the state of Florida but already has a national platform to influence the country. Our Pasco County Congressman, Gus Bilirakis, happens to be a vocal Christian. But all of our public officials are servants of the Lord in the sense that God positioned them for the good of our whole region.

***The next time you see a police officer***, say a prayer of thanksgiving that there are agents of God’s justice driving all over, protecting us from many dangers we will never even know about. And look at the REASON God does all of this:

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

1. **Equipping** them for specific work

“That you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.” Isaiah 45:3

God does all of this detailed orchestration of the lives and assignments of people **for a single purpose**: that people would give Him the credit, that they would see that it’s all from Him. Now, most people don’t see this or acknowledge God. There is no evidence from history that Cyrus the Great ever did. But that is still God’s purpose - ***to make Himself known*** both to the person being used in service to others and through that person as he or she serves others.

We get a window into this with **Nebuchadnezzar** of Babylon a few decades before Cyrus comes on the scene. This powerful king had a troubling dream about a tree being chopped down - and it turned out the tree was HIM. God “chopped him down” by taking away his reason and sending him out into the fields and pastures like a wild animal for a time until he realized that God alone sets up kings and gives them power. So he concluded:

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

1. **Equipping** them for specific work

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just.” Daniel 4:37

That’s the main takeaway today - ***to praise and thank God for all of His goodness*** - to recognize that everything we have and are is from Him. The people around you who serve you and your family well are a gift from God. The government officials all over this great country are appointed and equipped by God to serve us all.

And you and I as well are called and equipped for works of service to others for the same purpose - ***so they would see our good deeds and PRAISE OUR FATHER in heaven***. The goal is not to draw attention to US, impressing people with our kindness and service. The goal is to direct all the attention to Him - to give all the credit where it belongs - with the sovereign God who planned and positioned and empowers all of this. And that’s the third way God prepares and uses special servants. He calls them, equips them and:

**God Appoints and Anoints Special Servants:**

1. **Empowering** them to accomplish His purposes

“For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name.” Isaiah 45:4

This is a really amazing prophecy. God spoke through Isaiah over 100 years before Cyrus was born, giving the Persian King his name and promising to give him great military power and wealth for the very specific purpose of helping the Jews. God not only created, called and prepared Cyrus, **God is the one who made Cyrus effective**. God empowered this non-believing non-Jew to serve the kingdom purposes of God.

All of the promises in verse 1-3 are for this purpose in verse 4 - to bless God’s chosen people. For this purpose ***God subdued the nation of Babylon before Persia***. For this purpose God opened doors and demolished gates. For this purpose God leveled the ground, paved the way, broke down walls and provided hoards of treasure.

All for the building up of His people and ultimately ***for the glory of God’s own name***.

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“That you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.” Isaiah 45:3

These remain God’s purposes today - to build up the church, His people, and bring glory to His own Name, the name of Jesus. And, remarkably, God uses all kinds of people to accomplish these purposes, even if they don’t realize it.

So our first application, as we’ve seen, is to praise and thank God for His creative generosity in deploying people with all kinds of special gifts and abilities around us. I know I’m tremendously thankful for the array of ***excellent teachers*** in the Chicago suburbs who helped with my academic training K-12th grade. A few believers were sprinkled in there but most of them, as far as I know, were not Christians - they were just really good at English, writing, math, Chemistry, whatever.

Our family has been through a number of ***hospital and medical adventures***. I was blessed by a skillful ortho surgeon who repaired both of my Achilles tendons. Kristin had some excellent Ob/gyns who helped with her pre-natal care, labor and deliveries - all of which were complicated in one way or another. We’ve been thankful for gifted nurses who can start an IV on the first try or tap a vein on the first try; for talented doctors, anesthesiologists and more.

We greatly enjoy the parks and beaches around Tampa Bay - and know a lot of work goes into the care and maintenance of those parks. We certainly appreciate all the food service personnel who manage our grocery stores and restaurants. The list could go on and on.

Think back over just the last day or two and I bet you can picture ***a dozen or more people who served you in some way***. Praise God for the many blessings of living in the U.S. and in Tampa. His grace is all around us.

In addition to thanking God for these people who bless us - we should make a regular effort to **THANK THEM for their service to us**.

**Application:**

1. Thank **God** for His creative generosity
2. Thank **People** for their service

***I’m not saying we should spiritualize every conversation*** - “Thank you so much for these chicken nuggets - they were a Godsend to me today… Thank you for this incredible coffee - the Holy Spirit infused me with power through you…” That is over the top. But why not give God some credit and point that out to people?

* God knew I really needed some good news today - thank you for being an encouragement to me!
* You are really good at what you do - I can see that God gave you some really special gifts and abilities and I just want you to know I’m thankful for you today!

**Application:**

1. Thank **God** for His creative generosity
2. Thank **People** for their service
3. Share how God has **Blessed** you through them

Consider sending ***a card or a quick email or text***. Maybe pick up a small gift as a token of appreciation.

I’m not sure what the Jews did for Cyrus when he issued the decree that let them return to Israel. But I hope at least a few of them sent him a thank you note. Might have taken a few weeks to get there via camel mail, but you’d think it was an opportunity to give glory to God and help the Persian King see more clearly what he must have already suspected.

Look at the closing verses of Isaiah 45.

“To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance. Only in the LORD… are righteousness and strength.” Isaiah 45:23-24

Here is a decree from God 700 years before Jesus was born, and long before Paul would quote this verse in ***Philippians 2, applying it to Jesus*** as the one to whom every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess allegiance. The immediate context of that promise is this teaching about Cyrus, the Servant King. Whether or not he ever gave God the credit for his success in his life, King Cyrus definitely bowed the knee before the Lord when he died and stood before Jesus, the one true and ultimate King.

As we thank people for their service, we can help them see the One to whom we all owe our deepest gratitude and devotion - the One who gave us life, who named and called us, who equipped us and empowered us. In the end, everyone will bow before Him. The question is whether they will do so now and willingly or only when it is too late.

In the Lord, only in Him are the righteousness and strength to live gratefully and to share boldly about the goodness of our God. Let’s walk in His strength this week and give Him all the glory!

Let’s pray.