

“I Am the Lord, and There Is No Other”

Isaiah 44:21-45:13

These past couple months, I have been picking passages from Isaiah that stand out in their clarity or power to emphasize the true message of the gospel as it was made clear through this great Old Testament prophet. This afternoon’s text, and subject, is a bit more difficult than some because I want to keep a very broad focus, namely upon the glory of God himself.

One of the primary themes of Isaiah is this exalted sense of God’s glory, his incomparable excellencies, his superiority as God to all other false or imitation gods. And while I intentionally want to emphasize that superiority, I also want to be very practical and personal as I preach. I don’t want to present simply a theological lecture. I don’t want to preach in a way that is merely theoretical, that has no direct and immediate bearing on your ordinary, daily lives. But I do want to rise above what can easily become the mundane, common experience of those ordinary, daily lives.

In other words, I believe it will be very beneficial for us to contemplate the glory of God as he reveals himself through the prophet, and this particular text is very helpful to see how that exalted of glory of God is, indeed, very much related to our ordinary lives. And in the immediate context of the 8th century BC, with the nation of Judah warned about their future exile in Babylon, we find one of the most amazing and astounding prophecies in all of Scripture, for King Cyrus is named personally as the king who would bring about the return of Israel from their exile.

But I get ahead of myself a bit. Let’s go back and start in Isaiah 44:21. My first point is simply a focus upon,

I. GOD IN RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE.

Particularly here, his redeemed people. The whole book, of course, is an expression of that relation, for God is speaking directly to his people Israel. He is speaking personally. Warning them of the judgment of exile that will come to them because of their sin. But throughout, as well, promising them the redemption that only he, God, can provide. And we’ve seen in past weeks plenty of plain and clear references to Jesus, so that you can understand that these words of this prophecy are not simply for the benefit of the OT people of God. They are for us, too. As I’ve been emphasizing with Deuteronomy in the mornings.

So God is speaking to his people. That concept itself is a very valuable one to articulate and emphasize. God’s speaking to his people is at the very heart of his relationship with them. So the question becomes, what does he say? What is the message that God would have for his people? And the answer simply put, it is a message that there is a distinction between God and his people. They are fundamentally different. That difference is quite easy to express or define. It is the difference between,

A. The creator and the creature.

That distinction is one that you always need to emphasize, for it has so many implications for so many issues of our lives. The distinction is never ended, never diminished. We are creatures, by definition. That is our essential nature, a being whose existence has a beginning, we were created. And God is not one of us. We can’t reduce him or limit him in any way to include him in the realm of creatures. We don’t become gods, and God doesn’t become a creature. That sentence in itself will protect you from all sorts of wrong ideas and doctrine.

This is how the prophet puts it,
v.21

There are two implications there of this creator/creature distinction. First, it puts us in our place, with proper humility. We are a servant, formed by the creative hands of a great God. And we won't be forgotten. A creator doesn't forget the work of his hands.

Those two things create a very good and healthy self-awareness. We are kept humble, but not isolated in the despair of meaninglessness. Humble, but not alone. Humble, but not abandoned nor forsaken.

Let me go back to Isaiah 40, that we studied a few weeks ago. Again this combination is obvious. We as human beings are described in very humble terms. Grass, a drop in the bucket, small dust on the scales, grasshoppers, even the stubble that blows away in the wind. But that humble position is intended to draw a contrast with the greatness of God in his relationship to us. And that's the point. Not that we ought to have a low self-esteem, as the psychologists would put it, but that we find ourselves utterly dependent upon a great and mighty God. And so we read,

Is. 40:21 "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. 23 He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. 24 Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble."

But then, with that distinction between the creator and the creature, we creatures have this great encouragement,

Is 40:21 "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. 23 He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless. 24 Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble."

Then we read,

Is. 40:25 "To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is missing. 27 Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the Lord, And my just claim is passed over by my God"? 28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint."

That encouragement comes from a full recognition of who we are, and who God is. And the distinction between the two. There is another obvious encouragement and benefit in this distinction between the creator and the creature, and that is the blessing of,

B. Redemption and forgiveness.

He who formed us, who fashioned us from the dust of the ground, is also the one who is able to redeem us. And to do so by forgiving us our sin.

v.22

And that great work of redemption defines our role of worship. Praise. That's our relationship to God, not only entirely and completely dependent upon him for our existence. But entirely and completely dependent upon him for our redemption. And, if I can come full circle in terms of terms of this relationship we have with our creator, that is how he is most glorified. That is how is demonstrates most of all his glory. In the redemption, salvation, of his creatures.

v.23

Let's move on then to look at,

II. GOD IN RELATION TO THE WORLD.

And by that I mean the whole of his creation. Not just mankind. Not just human beings, nor just his covenant people. But the whole cosmos. What is God's relationship to this world he has created? The words of Isaiah are words in which God is praised for his power. His authority.

A. The sovereign authority of God in creation.

He made everything. And he rules everything. He is not the proverbial watchmaker, who makes an intricate watch only to wind it up and let it run out on its own. He is not passively watching and merely observing this world that he set into motion. No, there is, instead, a direct personal and powerful engagement with the world. In the words of our Shorter Catechism question defining providence, it is "his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions."

So we read,
v.24

There an expanded explanation of that in,
Is. 46:8 "Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors. 9 Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,' 11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it."

Similarly,

Is. 48:3 "I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. 4 Because I knew that you were obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze, 5 Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; Before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, Lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, And my carved image and my molded image Have commanded them."

This is our God, the God whom we serve and worship. He exercises sovereign authority over all his creation. In the theological language of the Apostle Paul in,

Eph. 1:11 "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

And that brings up the second, closely related point with regard to God in relation to the world. Namely,

B. The sovereign authority of God in redemption.

You cannot understand redemption, or salvation, unless you understand these things about the nature of God. God's purpose, God's decree, God's will, God's counsel includes all things that come to pass. We call that providence. But most especially it includes everything to do with our salvation. And that's the point of Isaiah's prophecy here in chapter 44 and 45.

So his message to the nation of Judah is a message of redemption. His message to his people who will be captured by the Babylonians and taken into exile is that they will be redeemed. By God's own specific decree.

v.26-27

And then, so personally, so specifically,
v.28

God will rebuild Israel. He will redeem the nation of his people. And on or about 700 BC, he not only predicts that restoration but he names the King who will bring it about. Cyrus, king of Persia. This was 150 years before Cyrus ever came to power as King, more than a century before he was even born.

God will use Cyrus, the Persian king, to bring about the restoration of his people Israel. That is as clear a picture as there ever was of the sovereign authority of God in redemption.

Ezra 1:1 "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God

be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem."

Isaiah's prophecy continues,

Is. 45:1 "Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: 2 'I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me."

And then, finally,

Is. 45:11 "Thus says the Lord, The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; And concerning the work of My hands, you command Me. 12 I have made the earth, And created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, And all their host I have commanded. 13 I have raised him up in righteousness, And I will direct all his ways; He shall build My city And let My exiles go free, Not for price nor reward," Says the Lord of hosts."

God is sovereign in his purpose and will to bring salvation to his people. He accomplishes his purpose, to the praise of his glory. And that is what this is all about!

God in relation to his people. Then God in relation to the world. Thirdly,

III. GOD IN RELATION TO HIMSELF.

And the point is,

A. There is no other.

v.5-8

That's the takeaway from all this. That's the key point. The main idea. Simple words, simple concept. But totally and deeply profound.

This is the consistent revelation of God, and Deuteronomy has much in common with Isaiah with this emphasis.

Deut. 4:35 "To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him. 36 Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. 37 And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day. 39 Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other."

Do you know the very next verse? It's the application.

Deut. 4:40 "You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time."

So our theology and our ethics have to be joined together. Our contemplation of the great, sovereign glory of God MUST lead to a transformation in the conduct of our lives. That connection must always, always be preserved.

And this emphasis abounds.

Is. 44:6 "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God."

Is. 44:8 "Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one."

Is. 45:14 "Thus says the Lord: "The labor of Egypt and merchandise of Cush And of the Sabeans, men of stature, Shall come over to you, and they shall be yours; They shall walk behind you, They shall come over in chains; And they shall bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying, Surely God is in you, And there is no other; There is no other God."

Is. 45:18 "For thus says the Lord, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the Lord, and there is no other."

Is. 45:21 "Tell and bring forth your case; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me. 22 "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

Is. 46:9 "Remember the former things of old, For I am God,

and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me.”

But that point doesn't stop there. There is one more point to be made, one final emphasis, one conclusion to this whole thing. And that is that,

B. There is no end of his glory.

Which means, our purpose as creature is to acknowledge that glory. Our calling as creatures is to recognize the glory of our creator, and praise him for it. Thus we are warned by this prophet,

v.9-10

We are the potsherd. We are the clay. We are the creature. And true relation, true godliness, is to be consumed with this glory that God ALONE possesses.

I believe that is the very point that Paul makes in Romans 11, after seeking to defend and proclaim the idea of God's sovereignty in redemption. And there are a lot of things in those chapters in the middle of Romans that cause confusion for some, and bring arguments and disagreements among others. But the argument, the debate, misses the point. This prophecy of the unique and exalted glory of God the creator doesn't just leave us with some sort of academic comprehension of doctrinal facts. No, it leads us to the very purpose of our lives as creatures, to give praise to the one and only one whose glory has no end.

So surely we don't strive with our Maker. We don't question the handiwork of God. And I am not about to engage in a contentious argument about the sovereignty of God in our salvation. But I will marvel with Isaiah, and with Paul, with the proper awareness of God's own self-existent glory.

Rom. 11:33 “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom

and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” 35 “Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?” 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

That's where we need to be when we contemplate the one who says to us, I am the Lord, and there is no other.” This is where our mind needs to be, seeking to comprehend the fullest extent of the glory of our great creator. “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.”