

20th Sunday after Pentecost

10/18/20

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Is God Responsible for Comfort or Calamity?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The text is Isaiah 45:1

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, (Isa 45:1 ESV)

The question for this sermon is the God of the Bible responsible for comfort or for calamity? Now before you answer let me alert you to the fact that there is no wrong answer. Does that mean I am saying that God is responsible for the calamity that happens in our lives even as Christians? The answer is found in the Old Testament passage from Isaiah 45, verse 7 with God speaking:

I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things. (Isa 45:7 ESV)

In the original Hebrew the word translated as well-being is the word peace and the word translated as calamity is the word evil. Does God create the evil in this world? Yet as with other Hebrew and Greek words, there can be more than one meaning for the same word. The Hebrew word for evil can also be understood as distress, misery, injury, adversity, harm, hurt, ruin and trouble.

At the time that Isaiah is a prophet, the two southern tribes of Judah had been taken into Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. They tried to blame their sufferings on the ten northern tribes who had been captured by the Assyrians. However, Judah had also been idolatrous in worshipping other gods as well as practicing evil.

But how does this man Cyrus get involved. And a bigger question is why in verse 1 of Isaiah 45 does it refer to Cyrus as the anointed of the Lord. The word anointed is also the word for Messiah.

Under his rule, the empire embraced all the previous civilized states of the [ancient Near East](#),^[8] expanded vastly and eventually conquered most of [Western Asia](#) and much of [Central Asia](#). From the [Mediterranean Sea](#) and [Hellespont](#) in the west to the [Indus River](#) in the east, Cyrus the Great created the largest empire the world had yet seen.

In the year 539 BCE, after uniting the Persian and Median kingdoms under his rule, king **Cyrus** subdued the Babylonian Empire. In 538 BCE King **Cyrus** made a public declaration granting the **Jews** the right to return to Judah and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. According to [Isaiah 45:1](#) God anointed Cyrus for this task, even referring to him as a [messiah](#) (lit. 'anointed one') and he is the only non-Jewish figure in the Bible to be called so.

So while God brought calamity upon His chosen people because of their sin, He also kept the promise to return them to the promised land to rebuild the temple and continue to worship Him. Yes, He is the God Who brings calamity but also brings peace as He promises. You can't find a better example of the calamity God brings than the cross which put to death His only begotten Son followed by the night of the resurrection when Jesus spoke the word of peace to the disciples in the upper room.

How about in our lives? At times calamity occurs because of sin such as with Herod Agrippa I (ruled A.D. 37-44 [41-44 in Judea]) Grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herodias, Herod Antipas's wife. Eventually ended up ruling over even more territory than did his grandfather, Herod the Great. In the book of Acts he is known as the one who put Peter in prison (Acts 12:1-5)...although he couldn't *keep* him there (12:6-19)! Also...“He did not give God the glory” when referred to as a god by the people of Tyre and Sidon and was thus struck by an angel and “eaten by worms” (Acts 12:20-23).

We all endure some calamity or suffering but not always because of a consequence for our sin. For example, in John 9 Jesus meets a man who was born blind. The disciples ask whether that blindness was due to the man's sin or the sin of his parents. Jesus replies that the works of God should be revealed in him.

For the world calamities actually can come from acts of nature such as floods, weather problems and earthquakes. But for the Christian we have a question for others to answer about such calamities. If God is not responsible for all the calamities in the world, then who is responsible? Would you rather have the devil as the one who has power to do what he wants.

Recall that even with Job the devil had to have God's permission to cause suffering for Job. And then we find the reason was to make Job a far greater believer in God after he experienced the kind of suffering and calamity that would move a person of the world to curse God which Job never did.

Instead Job responds with silence and repents in dust and ashes when he confronts the true God Who indeed does what Isaiah says in being the one Who alone creates comfort and calamity.

God did it during holy week which is all the evidence we need to have the even though He will permit temptations to come to His children, they will not be strong enough to destroy our faith and with the temptation will come a way of escape. For the promises of God are ever with us and for that we can endure whatever comes our way. Amen.

And may the peace of God.....