

# Isaiah 44:1-45:13

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[ 0 : 00 ] Do open your Bibles to Isaiah 44 and 45. It's on page 605 and 606.

! Isaiah 44 and 45. A good friend of mine was at a funeral this week.

And he was taking part in the funeral but he wasn't preaching. And there was an Anglican man preaching. And this is what he said. He said, they say in heaven the streets are paved with gold but I'm a biker.

And so I like to think of them as a dirt track. They say in heaven there'll be choirs singing but I'm more of a Rolling Stones man myself. And I hope they'll perform.

That is remarkable for a number of reasons. Not the least spending eternity in the company of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. I don't think it's a particularly pleasant thought of them playing.

[ 1 : 03 ] And we will come back to that in a minute. We've been thinking a lot about in Isaiah idols. And idolatry. 40 to 48 really is about that. And we saw that an idol is anything in our lives that is more important to us than God.

An idol is anything that absorbs your heart and your imagination more than God. Anything that you seek to give you.

What only God can give you. And we saw that an idol can really be anything and everything in our lives. And it can stretch, can't it, from our career to our children.

To sex. To possessions. To money. But the preacher of that funeral that I started with. He illustrates something else that we can make into an idol.

And that is our interpretation of God. And his promises. If God says the streets will be paved with gold. Who are you to say, in fact I'd rather that they be a dirt track.

[ 2 : 19 ] If God says that there will be choirs of angels singing. Who are you to say, well actually I'd rather the Roman Steffans. And this idol manifests itself. In the kind of line that you hear.

I like to think of heaven as dot dot dot dot dot. Or perhaps. Even more commonly. When people say. Well the God that I believe in.

Dot dot dot dot dot dot. And we make God in our own image. And we make God in our own likeness. And the consequence of that is.

Surprise surprise. God's view of things. Is exactly the same as our view of things. Who would have guessed? And God's tastes. Are really similar to our tastes.

And God's rules. Are exactly what we think the rules should be. We created God in our own image. Who always agrees with us.

[ 3 : 15 ] 2005. Kristen Smith. He's a professor. Notre Dame. Or Notre Dame. University. And he examined.

The religious beliefs. In the US. And I've said this before. But he said that. The leading faith. In the United States of America. Is not Christianity. And not Buddhism. And not Islam.

And not atheism. It's what Smith called. Do you remember? Moralistic. Therapeutic. Deism. I've spoken about it in the past. What it really is.

Is a do good. Feel good. Spirituality. But has little. Or nothing to do with the God of the Bible. And even less to do with following. Or loving Jesus enough.

To follow him into the world. Well in the passage. That I read for you this morning. It makes clear that you. Yes you. And I. Are not given.

[ 4 : 12 ] The liberty to define God. As we would like. Nor are we. Given the liberty. To question what he does. And why he doesn't. It's another call.

From Isaiah. Yet another call. To flee from idols. And in this case. The idol. Of a God. Made in our own image. And instead.

We are to run. To the one true God. And specifically. We will see. That it is a call. To trust God. Enough. That when he acts. In ways that shock us. That we would cling to him. Rather than make an idol. More to our liking. I'm going to look at a larger section. Than we read today. From 44. 24. To the end of chapter 45. What we will see. Is we will see. That God calls. On his people. To trust him. Not only. With the end. But also. With God's means. To the end.

[ 5 : 09 ] God calls on his people. To trust him. Not only. With the end. But also. With the means. To the end. Three things. The mystery of God's ways. The problem of human arrogance.

And number three. The ultimate end. Of the surprising means of God. So first of all. The mystery of God's ways. In chapter 44. In verses 24 to 8. God again. Reminds us. Of his uniqueness. He reminds us. Of his sole claim. To be the sovereign. Lord of the universe. The five chapters. The five verses. At the end of chapter 44. Is one sentence. It's one of the longest sentences. In the Bible. And the emphasis. In this sentence. Is the sovereign. Rule. And reign. And authority. Of the Lord. Where he does. What he wishes. In the world. And with the world. He has made. And in verse 26. God turns his attention. Not to what he's done. But his future accomplishments. What he's going to do.

[ 6 : 05 ] In the future. Look at verse 26. He says. Listen in verse 24. I am the Lord.

Who made. All things. Who stretched out the heavens. Who spread out the earth. By itself. Who forsakes the signs of liars. And makes fools of diviners. Who turns wise men back. And makes their knowledge foolish. Who confirms the word of his servant. And fulfills the counsel of his messengers. Who says of Jerusalem.

She shall be inhabited. Of the cities of Judah. They shall be inhabited. I will raise up their ruins. It's future. Who says to be dry. I will dry up your rivers. Who says of Cyrus. He is my shepherd. And he shall fulfill my purpose. Saying of Jerusalem. She shall be built. And of the temple. Your foundation shall be laid. Is God picks up on the promise. Back in chapter 40. That he's going to bring his people. Back from exile in Babylon.

[ 7 : 02 ] Back to Jerusalem. Back to the city. Of God. Which will be rebuilt. But the climax of that announcement. Is an absolute bombshell. To the Israelites.

God's people in exile. They have this wonderful promise. God will bring you back. God will bring you home. But the natural question is. How? How are you going to do that?

How are you going to restore Jerusalem Lord? And rebuild the temple? And the Lord's answer. Can you see it in verse 28? Is Cyrus. Who is my shepherd. Who will accomplish all that I please.

In a moment we'll come back to. Why that is such a bombshell. But we do need to pause for a moment. And we need to do a little sidebar here. Some of you may have been exposed.

To the view. That the book of Isaiah. Is actually written by more than one author. If you do RE. I think it's GCSE. Or A level. You might find that. So the argument goes.

[ 8 : 02 ] If you read the kind of lots of the commentaries. Chapter 1 to 39. Is written by the prophet Isaiah. But chapter 40 to 55. Were penned by kind of.

Isaiah Anonymous. An anonymous prophet. Who lived during the Babylonian exile. And he's referred to as the second Isaiah. And then some propose.

In chapters 56 to 66. That you're reading yet another. Later Anonymous prophet. So there's actually three Isaiahs. Who wrote the book. And one of the main arguments.

That is used. About why there has to be three authors. Is to do with this guy Cyrus. The prophet Isaiah is speaking. Of someone.

150 years. Before they come. Isaiah is speaking. 150 years. Before Cyrus shows up. On the world stage.

[ 8 : 58 ] As the king of Persia. To deliver Judah from exile. And the experts say. That is ridiculous. How can he do that? How can he name someone. 150 years into the future.

It's impossible. It can't be the same man. How could anyone have possibly known. The name of the king of Persia. Cyrus didn't even live at that point.

The only possible explanation. Can be. That there's more than one Isaiah writing. At different times. Now far be it from me. To question the interpretive abilities.

Of these scholars. But to make that argument. Completely misunderstands. The book of Isaiah. And particularly Isaiah chapter 40 to 48. Think about what we've learned.

Over these last few weeks. Because what is. In Isaiah chapter 40 to 48. The ultimate test of God. What proves. The true God.

[ 9 : 54 ] From the false God. According to Isaiah 40 to 48. If you want to know. That your God is the real God. Here is the test. The test is. Can he predict the future? And so we saw two weeks ago.

In chapter 44. In verse 7. Just look at that verse with me. Who is like me. Let him proclaim it. God says. Let him declare. And set it before me. Since I appointed the ancient people. Let them declare. What is to come. And what will happen. It's precisely. That. Because God can. And does. Give the name of the Persian king.

Some hundred and fifty years before. That he comes. Ahead of time. To prove that he is the true God. It's the whole point of the narrative. From 40 to 48. God says. That is the test.

No one else. Can do that sort of thing. Because there is no God. Besides Yahweh. Chapter 45. There is no God. But God. But back to the Bombshell.

[ 10 : 54 ] The person whom God says. He will use the shepherd. His people out of exile. Back to Jerusalem. Is the Persian king Cyrus. And just in case. The Israelites think. They misheard God. On this one. God goes on in chapter 45.

He says verse 1. Thus says the Lord. To his anointed. To Cyrus. Whose right hand I grasp. To subdue nations before him.

And to loose the belts of kings. To open doors before him. The gates. May not be closed. I will go before you. And land on the exalted places. I will break in pieces. The doors of bronze.

Cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness. The hordes and secret places. That you may know. That I. It is I the Lord. The God of Israel. Who call you by your name. Well as if it could get any worse for Israel.

It just has. Because Cyrus. Whom God explains in verses 4 and 5. Is an unbeliever. Cyrus is a pagan. But he's not only.

[ 11 : 56 ] The Lord's shepherd. He's the Lord's anointed. Do you know what that word is? The Lord's anointed. That word is Messiah.

Cyrus. Is the Lord's Messiah. And now you start to see. Don't you. Why this is quite hard to strum up. For the Israelites. Shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd.

David was my shepherd. Shepherd. Shepherd is a title. For God's anointed king. Anointed. Is a title for Messiah. And they were titles.

Of the royal line of David. And this was Cyrus. Cyrus is not in that line. Cyrus is an idolater. Has Isaiah just been telling us.

Through these chapters. How terrible idolatry is. So the question is. What is going on? But what is going on is. God is demonstrating. His absolute freedom. And sovereignty.

[ 12 : 53 ] As the one true God. To do what he wishes. In the way that he wishes. And God may disapprove of idolatry. But he can still use.

The idolater. For some good purpose. The fact that he will use. Cyrus. Here is not vouching. For Cyrus lifestyle. But Cyrus will be his Messiah.

His anointed one. His appointed one. And he will be equipped. By the Lord. For a specific task. Which the Lord has selected. He is a temporary Messiah. He is the human king.

Chosen. As the Lord's representative. To stand at the centre. Of God's promises. For his people in the world. And God will orchestrate. Every step. Every step of Cyrus role.

From first to last. As emphasised in verses 1 to 5. And as you read those verses. You will notice. It's not Cyrus who is doing it. But it is the Lord.

[ 13 : 52 ] Through Cyrus. Everything Cyrus will achieve. He is achieving. Through the agency of the Lord. And if you want to find a passage.

That tells you that God. Can and will work. Through any person. In your life. And any circumstance. In your life. To achieve his purpose.

In your life. You could do a lot worse. In this way. And so that person. At school. Or at work. Or even church.

Who rubs you up. The wrong way. God can. And may use. For his purposes. In your life. That relative. That relative. That you dread.

Seeing. At family reunions. God will work. Through her. Or him. To shape you. Into what he wants you to be. God is the God.

[14:49] Who will use. Good times. In your life. And God is the God. Who will use. Bad times. In your life. For his intended purpose.

To deepen. And renew. Your faith in him. And so in verses 6 to 7. God says. I bring. Prosperity. And I create.

Calamity. So that people. May know that. I am the Lord. Everything. And every person. In this universe. Is at God's disposal. For his working.

Out of his will. And the rising of Cyrus. Is a demonstration. That he will work. In ways. You least expect. And I think.

This morning. If you are sitting there. And you have got a problem. With this. It is because. You do not. Know. God. And he will work.

[15:46] In ways. That we least expect. And sometimes. We do not like. The way he works. For our good. Such is the mystery.

Of his ways. But not surprisingly. The people of God here. They are not too happy. About this plan. And they obviously. Voiced their strong objections. And so here. We come secondly. To the problem. Of human arrogance.

We are not actually. Given their precise words. But we are given. God's response. To their objection. And his response. Comes in verses 9. And 10. Of Isaiah 45. And he says.

Woe to him. Who strives. With him. Who quarrels. A pot. Among earthen pots. Does the clay.

Say to him. Who forms it. What are you making? Or your work. Has no handles. Woe to him. Who says to a father. What are you begetting? Or to a woman.

[16:41] With what? Are you in labour? God responds. To the Israelites. Complaints. With a reality check. And a comparison.

He says. Your objections. To me. Are like. A talking pot. Speaking. To the potter.

It's like the child. Intimately challenging. His or her parents. And God is saying. Who do you think you are? In other words.

God is saying to you and me. You are nowhere near. Being in a position. To require me. To justify. My ways to you. I do want to say this.

God is not objecting. To honest questions. Honest questions. Are good. You've got plenty examples. In the bible. Of people coming to God. With honest questions.

[17:40] And honest doubts. Doubts are good. As long as you deal with them. And God in his grace. And in his kindness. Gives answers. And further explanations. To honest questions.

I doubt. But what he does object to. Is when you accuse him. Of bungling your life. Of messing up your life. He is offended.

When we sit in judgment. On God. As if we know. What should happen in our lives. Better than he does. And God will accomplish.

His plans in our lives. In his own way. By his own unadorned power. And as much as that might. Strike against. Our own pride. He is not looking.

For you and him. For you and I. To form a committee. To help him work this out. He is not asking you. To sit on a board. With him. To find out. How your life should go. He is totally able.

[18:35] And totally self-sufficient. To do that on his own. And for us to think. Otherwise. Is saying. It is a sign of arrogance. On our part. Now having said that.

The fact is. That God does not ignore. His people. Nor has he left us blind. To his purposes here. It may have seemed. Might it.

That to many. To many. That by giving the title. Of Messiah to Cyrus. That God has washed his hands. With his people. But as you read. Through the section. God shows. That isn't the case.

At all. And he gives us. Clues. To what his purpose. Is. Through Cyrus. We already saw it. At the end of chapter 34. God will use Cyrus. To rebuild Jerusalem. To begin.

To begin the rebuilding. Of the temple. We see some other examples. Of God's intentions. In a couple of other verses. In verse 4. Of chapter 45. For the sake of my servant Jacob.

[19:30] And Israel my chosen. I call you by name. I name you. Though you do not acknowledge me. Know me. In chapter 45. In verse 13. I have stirred him up. In righteousness. And I will make all his ways. His level.

And he shall build my city. And set my exiles free. Not for price. Or reward. Says the Lord of hosts. God is raising Cyrus.

As a temporary Messiah. For a specific part. On behalf of his people. And God is saying. I have not forgotten you. I have not set aside.

The promises that I made. To your father David. But as Isaiah does. All the way through this book. He shows us. That God's salvation plan. Goes way beyond this rank here.

And so thirdly. Isaiah points us. To the ultimate end. Of the surprising means of God. And he does so. Beginning in verse 14. Look at that verse. He says.

[ 20 : 26 ] The wealth of Egypt. The merchandise of Cush. And the Sabaeans' men of stature. Shall come over to you. And be yours. They shall follow you. They shall come over in chains. And bow down to you. They will plead with you. Saying surely God is in you.

And there is no other. There is no God besides him. Isaiah uses Exodus language. I don't know if he picked that up. Exodus language.

To speak of this great reversal. In the future. But rather. Than God's people. Being in slavery. To other nations.

Like they were in Egypt. Like they are in exile. The day will come. When those other nations. Will come to God's people. In submission and humility. And they will recognize.

The other nations will recognize. There is only one God. And we have to worship him. And we started to see the fulfillment. A few weeks ago. In the Christmas stories. Do you remember?

[ 21 : 23 ] Do you remember the genealogy. With the outsiders. And the foreigners. You see the magi. Coming to Jerusalem. To worship the one true King Jesus. But that is just the beginning.

Of God's purpose. Let it be. Verses 20 to 22. Assemble yourselves. And come. Draw near together. You survivors of nations. They have no knowledge. Who carry about their wooden idols.

And they keep on praying. To a God who cannot save. Declare and present your case. Let them take counsel together. Who told this long ago. Who declared it of old. Was it not I the Lord.

And there is no other God besides me. A righteous God and a saviour. There is none besides me. Turn to me. And be saved. Look unto me. And be saved. All the ends of the earth.

For I am God. And there is no other. God's intention at every stage. Including in Cyrus. Is that his salvation. Will go global.

[ 22 : 24 ] That his salvation. Will go to the ends of the earth. And everything. He is doing. Is towards that end. And so he uses.

A temporary pagan. Messiah called Cyrus. To return his people to Jerusalem. And Judah. Why? Because the ultimate Messiah. The Messiah.

To whom all the other. Smaller Messiahs. Was not going to appear. In Babylon. Look at what Isaiah says. In chapter 40.

And verse 9. He says. Go up on a high mountain. O Zion. Herald of good news. Lift up your voice. With strength. O Jerusalem. Herald of good news.

Lift it up. Fear not. Say to the cities. Behold. Your God. God's people have to get home. And why do they have to get home?

[ 23 : 21 ] To prepare the way for the Lord. And so God. Is bending. All of history. Including what we. Believe.

And call. Secular history. History. And he's bending. That history. To advance. His ultimate purpose. So that just over 500 years after. God does the unimaginable.

And God anoints a pagan king. To shepherd his people. And God does the even more unimaginable. He takes human flesh. And he's born of a virgin.

And he's born. In poverty. In the person of his son. Jesus Christ. The Messiah. And then God. Then Jesus does the even more unimaginable. The true Messiah.

The anointed king. The glorious shepherd. The son of God. Dies at the hand of his enemies. And then God does the even more unimaginable. He raises him from the dead.

[ 24 : 19 ] As a demonstration. That Jesus. Has come to pay the penalty. For all our idolatry. And all our sin. And to give salvation. But to give salvation to whom? Isaiah says.

To all. Who turn to him. And be saved. Because there is no other God. And so you trace. Through the New Testament.

And the good news. Goes out from Jerusalem. Judea. And then to Samaria. And to the ends of the earth. And so you get to the end of the book of Acts.

And Acts 28. It ends so oddly. Doesn't it? Every time you read it. You think. Why is it ending here? This is the wrong ending. But it's telling you. It's going out to the ends of the earth. From Judea.

To North Africa. To Asia Minor. To Europe. To the ends of the earth. Then God calls you and me. To trust not only in the ends. But with the means. To the end. And indeed.

[ 25 : 21 ] When we see God at work. We should not only trust him. In the means he uses. But we should worship. And marvel. At the means he uses. That our God bends history. Charles Spurgeon.

C.H. Spurgeon. Lived in the 19th century. Spurgeon. He's widely regarded. As one of the great preachers. Of modern times. He's referred to often. As the prince of preachers. As we do.

Sometimes a little bit snobby. About Spurgeon. I think we shouldn't do. Spurgeon's published sermons. Run. To over three and a half thousand. They fill 63 volumes.

If you want to buy any of them for me. It is estimated. That in those sermons. Spurgeon told the story. Of his conversion. How he became a Christian. Some 280 times.

It's incredible isn't it. You think. I repeat illustrations. 280 times. I haven't even told. The ugly duckling story. That often. And I think the reason.

[ 26 : 23 ] That Spurgeon. Spurgeon tells the story. Of his conversion. So many times. Is because it was a demonstration. Of the surprise. Amazing means. Of God. To that end.

In Spurgeon's life. So let me tell it to you. Here's one of those accounts. A 15 year old boy. On Sunday. The 6th of January. 1815.

Spurgeon writes. Sometimes I think. I might have been in darkness. And despair now. Had it not been. For the goodness of God. In sending a snowstorm. One Sunday morning. When I was going to a place.

Of worship in Colchester. When I could go. No further. Because of the snow and cold. I turned down a court. And came to a little. Primitive Methodist chapel. And in that chapel. There might have been.

A dozen. Or 15 people. The minister. Did not come that morning. Snowed up. I suppose. A poor man. A shoemaker. A tailor. Or something of that sort. Went up. Nervously.

[ 27 : 17 ] Into the pulpit. To preach. He was obliged. To stick to his text. For the simple reason. That he had nothing else to say. The text was. Isaiah 45. Verse 22.

Look unto me. And be ye saved. All the ends of the earth. He did not even pronounce. The words rightly. But that did not matter. There was.

I thought. A glimpse of hope for me. In the text. He began thus. My dear friends. This is a very simple text. Indeed. It says. Look. Now that does not take.

A deal of effort. It ain't no lifting. Your foot. Or your finger. It is just. Look. Well. A man. Need not go to college. To learn to look.

You may be the biggest fool. And yet. You can look. A man. May not even be worth. A hundred. A year. To look. Anyone can look. A child. Can look.

[ 28 : 12 ] But this is what the text says. Then it says. Look unto me. I. Said he. In a broad ethics dialect.

Many of you. Are looking to yourselves. No use looking there. You'll never find comfort in yourselves. And the good man. Followed up his text in this way.

Look unto me. I'm sweating. Great drops of blood. Look unto me. I'm hanging on the cross. Look. I am dead and buried. Look unto me.

I rise again. Look unto me. I ascend. I am sitting at the father's right hand. Oh look to me. Look to me. When he got about that.

When he got about that length. And managed to spit out ten more minutes. He was at the length of his tether. And he looked at me. Under the gallery. And I dare say.

[ 29 : 06 ] With so few present. He knew me to be a stranger. He then said. Young man. You look very miserable. I did. But I had not been accustomed.

To have remarks made. On my personal appearance. From the pulpit before. However. It was a good blow struck. He continued. And you will always be miserable. Miserable in life.

And miserable in death. If you do not obey my text. But if you obey now. This moment. You will be saved. And then he shouted. As only a primitive Methodist can. Young man.

Look to Jesus Christ. There and then. The cloud was gone. The darkness was rolled away. And that moment.

I saw the sun. And I could have risen that moment. And sung with the most enthusiastic. Of them. Of the precious blood of Christ. God has bent. All of history.

[ 30 : 03 ] And is bending. All of history. So that to the ends. Of the earth. From Colchester. Colchester in England. To Colcutta. In India. From Ealing.

To Egypt. All who turn to him. Will be saved. And the invitation. That God made. To Spurgeon. That snowy Sunday morning.

On January the 6th. 1850. Is the invitation. It makes to you. And at the end. Of Isaiah 45. The invitation. Presents us. With a choice. Of eternal shame.

Because we refuse. The invitation. Or eternal delight. Because we accept it. God works. God works. God works. Through the most.

! In no small part. Because God works. Through the most. Shocking means. At times. God works. Through the most. Unlikely candidate.

[ 31 : 00 ] Whether it's a tailor. In a pulpit. Or a most. Unlikely messiah. Like a pagan king. Called Cyrus. God calls. On his people. To trust him.

Not only. With the ends. But also. His means. To those ends. Let's pray.