

## Isaiah 45:9-13 (NKJV)

<sup>9</sup> "Woe to him who strives with his Maker! *Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'?*

<sup>10</sup> Woe to him who says to *his* father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to the woman, 'What have you brought forth?' "

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> I have made the earth, And created man on it. I--My hands--stretched out the heavens, And all their host I have commanded.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

Remember our outline?

44:24 – 45:8 God accepts final responsibility for everything that happens

**45:9-13 God warns us not to take offense at all**

45:14-25 God calls us to embrace him as God

Now we need to remember that Isaiah had just told these people that God was going to use Cyrus, a heathen military leader not yet born, to provide the deliverance of the people of God who were not yet in captivity. Wow. That seems like a stretch. Now how would the religious experts of Isaiah's day have responded to that? Nope. That can't be. That does not fit our box. That is not how God responds. That is not what He would do. That would be humiliating to us. We are God's people after all. He will provide His deliverance in the way we expect. Anyone saying anything opposed to that can be rejected.

Our passage is a real warning about putting God into a box regarding how He carries out His plan. We have got to orient with who we are dealing with. This isn't a brother or sister in Christ. This is God. And **God's plans do not fit well into our box.**

And then we will bring this a little closer to home for us. We will take it beyond how God might work with **His nation or His people**. We take it beyond how God might accomplish His will **in a people group**. We begin asking questions about how God works **directly in my life**.

Have you ever wondered where the line is between **being honest** with God with our questions and **being offensive** to God with our questions? We see

both examples in scripture. We see people like David who asked very serious questions of God and he was not rebuked for it. We see others all throughout scriptures who offend God by their questions. Even John the Baptist's father was silenced by God for 9 months for asking a question.

Where is the line?

I think verse 9 in our text reveals it.

**9 "Woe to him who strives with his Maker!**

The word in verse 9 for strive means

**to strive, to contend, to dispute, and to conduct a lawsuit. The verb means to conduct a lawsuit or legal case and all that it involves.**

*Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary - Old Testament.*

Suppose someone wrongs you. What would lead you to take that person to court? If you trusted the person to be fair with you, would you take them to court? If you knew they were looking out for your best interest at the expense of their own, would you sue them? We all know the answer. We would only sue someone who **owes** us something that **they won't pay**. They have **done us harm** and will **not grant restitution**. That is why we go to court.

Well that is the point here. Woe to anyone who looks at what God is doing, looks at what God has arranged, and says **God, you owe me better than this**. You are being cruel to me. You have not given me what I have a right to. You have tricked me. I have trusted you and you have harmed me. Now **pay up**. Or at least **own up**. Admit that you have wronged me.

What we see in this striving is a blatant and inherent mistrust of God. And ultimately it is **a criticism of God and His love for us**. This goes beyond a statement of dislike of our circumstances. It goes beyond the process of wrapping our head around **how to think right** about the spot we find ourselves in. It goes beyond our initial emotional response to a painful event. No. This is a position we take where we think we have been wronged by God and we want Him to change. We want Him to fess up. We want Him to reverse His actions. We have come up with an equation for God that says, **If you love me you will do this**. And then God doesn't do it and we think we are being smart and righteous to judge God.

Have you ever watched children do this to their parents? Maybe they don't word it that way, but they come up with some arbitrary thing and they say, if you don't do this thing, or if you don't give me this thing, or if you don't allow me to do this thing, you are not fit to be my parent. I have a right then to rebel or disobey or whatever.

Have you ever had someone under your authority do that to you? They come up with some thing that they define as loving and then they hold you to their

standard. And then one thing that happens for sure. If your loving them violates that artificial standard there is going to be a steep price to pay. There is not going to be any room for rational conversation. You are guilty and they are going to try you and penalize you in the court of their mind. And the true guilty party is never identified. There is little more dangerous to a loving relationship than to come up with arbitrary, **“If you loved me you would do this for me.”** Have you ever noticed in the epistles that wives are never instructed to evaluate their husbands. And children are never given the job of evaluating their parents. We are told how to carry out our roles to God first and then to anyone else we are in authority under. And when brothers or sisters violate God’s clear word we are to bring it to their attention. But when we come up with an arbitrary standard that says, “If you love me you will do this one thing” we have just taken authority away from the one who has authority over us. We have **become** the authority and they must submit to our demands. We become terrorist in our relationships.

Are you doing this to one of your authorities. Children, Wives, Employees? Our hearts are the trickiest people we know.

This is also what we do when we strive with God. We hold Him to our arbitrary standard. We usurp God’s authority and start telling Him what He is going to do or else. And somehow we feel like we have a perfect right to throw our fits and to do our own things if He does not live up to our expectations.

Well Isaiah is telling us, our God is not going to meet our expectations. He will not. Because we are not smart enough to know what to expect. We are children and He is the parent. But it goes even further than that. Look what He says next.

***Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'?***

What do you think this is saying? It looks to me like it is telling us to limit our evaluations to those as powerless as ourselves. Keep your lawsuits limited to those who might have actually done you some harm. But when we start evaluating God we have gone a million times over our pay grade. We have left our league. We have entered a world we know nothing about.

Now we are in the realm of a pot evaluating its creator. Imagine that. This would be like Ruth fixing an imperfection on a piece of furniture and the furniture chiming up by asking what right Ruth has to make this change. Or the furniture rejecting Ruth because she decided to strip the old finish off the wood.

We really need perspective in our relationship with God. God allows honest questioning out of our weakness and need. But even when **we ask** we have to realize **what we are doing**. We are so far from **being like God** that much of the time we could not contemplate His full answer, even if He were to give it. We need to accept that, **1** God does not need to answer our questions. **2.** We are not in a position where we can evaluate the answer even if He does answer it. **3.** We are likely not even going to have a clue about what God is talking about **if He were** to answer it.

That is really what our negative evaluations of God are like. They are that impotent. They are that unreasonable. They are that uninformed.

And he goes a step further. Shall the handiwork say, He has no hands? One is questioning **the wisdom** of God. The other is questioning **the power of God**. And aren't those our normal 2 gripes. We complain that either God **can't do** something or **won't chose to**. We doubt His wisdom or His power.

And yet here we are, breathing because of God's Wisdom and Power.

Isaiah goes on-

**10 Woe to him who says to his father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to the woman, 'What have you brought forth?' "**

We have got to quickly see the absurdity here. And that is Isaiah's point. What child had control of his own conception? What child oversaw his genetics. What child picked his parents and gave them advice? The very idea of it is funny. The child's choice had nothing, at all, in any way, to do with his birth. It happened **to him**, not **because of him**. He was **uninformed** and completely **powerless**. The very two attributes we question in God.

The point can't be missed. We are in no position to evaluate what God is doing in our lives.

We want to think if we don't like something, we have a gripe. We want to think if God doesn't do what we like, He is somehow letting us down. But the point here is clear. We do not know enough about His realm to even have an opinion apart from anything that God chooses to tell us about what He is doing. We waste so much time resisting God, whining about how hard it is, whining about how much we don't like it or how much we can't do it. And our qualifications for these evaluations? We are as smart as clay and as influential as a pre conceived child. Yep. That will get our heads puffed up won't it?

**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.**

Now God responds. First He gives His credentials. The Holy One of Israel and his Maker. It has got to be funny to God when humans get all sure of

themselves and evaluate God. We come at it from our limited perspective as if we are somehow experts of the created world, as if we created it. And we mock God as if we know a thing or two. It is really silliness that the creation would mock the creator.

These Israelites knew about the Holy One. They had a rich history of the majesty of God. They have known that He is so unapproachable that getting close would kill them. And they knew their history. They were an unassuming people that God picked out to make them great. He establishes who He is first. Then He continues.

**"Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; And concerning the work of My hands, you command Me.**

Now there is some mystery here.

Is this a rebuke or an encouragement? It has been interpreted both ways.

Given that the context is rebuke I will stick with that interpretation.

If we read it in this way, look at what it is saying. It is the perfect example of what we are so prone to do to God.

First, we want God to reveal His will. We want Him, from His perspective, to reveal to us what is going to happen. Sometimes we do this in all sincerity.

Sometimes we do it to appease our curiosity. Sometimes we do it because we trust **our preparation** for the future more than we **trust God's**. We often think we want to trust God. And in many ways we do, as long as God is giving us what we want. But our default position tends to be to trust **our resources** over **God's**.

In this case if we were to ask for the future of God's people, God's answer was going to be, I am sending Cyrus, the gentile heathen, as your savior. And what is the reaction? At this point the people of God want to tell God what He is allowed to do and what He is not allowed to do. Does that sound at all familiar?

Maybe you have already determined what God is not allowed to do in your life. Maybe you have determined what you won't endure from His hand. Most of the time we don't really give this much thought ahead of time. We know it when we see it. We experience something that is so unpleasant that we say, no God, you cannot do this. No God, I cannot do this. No God, you must stop doing this. We let God know by how we respond that we have no intentions of accepting what He has for us. Maybe we come up with theology or reason that **forbids God** from doing what He is doing. We want God's sovereignty working for us. We want the eternal security He will provide. We want to ask God for the things only God can do. But **we don't want** to trust Him for every outcome of every action. We do not want to rely upon Him fully to grant to us

whatever He decides is for our best. We want to set boundaries at which we will take over. We want to set limitations to God's authority over our lives. We want to issue a few commands to our God.

We need to remember- Woe to Him who strives with His maker. It is dangerous ground. It is silly ground. It is foolish ground.

Where are we doing that? Where are we setting limitations on what God can do in our lives? What will you not accept from God's hands? What do you refuse to deal with faithfully because you don't like the position God has placed you in. Where do we pity ourselves, or make excuses for bad behavior, or make excuses for not doing the right thing because we don't like our circumstances? Consider what we are doing as **giving commands to God**. I will not serve you, I will not obey you, if you do this.

**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.**

In the context of our text, what the listeners would have heard is that God is not just the God of the Israelites. God is not defeated when He allows His people to go into exile. Their exile does not affect His ability to act in the least. He is not restricted when His people act like jerks. **They** may have experienced limitations, but **God** does not.

He did not just create Jews. He created the Gentiles as well. He made the whole globe, not just Israel. He created the heavens, not just the skies over Israel. The whole globe is spinning at God's command. If we are ever to do proper business with God, we have God to see Him from God's perspective, not ours. We want to evaluate God based on what harm He allows to befall us or what pleasures He withholds from us. What a ridiculously small world that is. God expands our vision to the mysteries of the universe and the whole globe of mankind over all human history.

We have seen the use of the word "hands" now several times in our text.

**shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'?**

First the foolishness of even thinking that **God has no hands concerning the work of My hands, you command Me.**

Then the foolishness of telling God what He **should do** with His hands.

Now we see what God does with His hands. He creates everything that there is. He creates everything that supports human life. And He creates human life.

And we are human. And we are trying to tell God what to do? We are trying to evaluate His love for us? And how much sense does that make?

Now we get to the crux of the matter in this text. Now we get to the thing that God's people were so offended about. And God has built His case step by step

so that when He says the next thing there is no rebuttal allowed. Now He reveals what will happen and He is not accepting any commands from would be consultants.

**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.**

Every scholar I read said that the Hebrew demands this to be about Cyrus. Cyrus is the him that was raised up in righteousness. Think about this. How. How could this be? This is God's Chosen People that we are talking about. Think about how God showed Himself so magnificent in getting His people released from Egypt. Think about the mighty acts and wonders. Think about all of this was in direct contrast and opposition to any earthly ruler. Now it looks like God is changing all the rules. This time it is like God saying Pharaoh is going to lead His children out of Egypt.

No. This cannot be. No. This does not make sense. No. This does not fit the box that I have placed God in. What do we do when this happens? Well, our first reaction is to give commands. We want to tell God that He cannot destroy our expectations in such a way. We cannot handle such a concept of God. He must conform to what we expect.

But those are never terms that God accepts. He will not be limited in the ways He chooses to love His children. He will not accept it when we say, If you truly love me you will do this or that. He will not pity us for refusing to accept His sovereign rule over all of life. He says Woe to the one who wants to blame God for **our problem** with how God truly is and how God chooses to act.

Now what does it mean- I raised him up in righteousness? Is it that God chose Cyrus because he was so righteous? Or did God make Cyrus a super right person? No. That probably isn't the way this word is used. It probably means I have raised him up rightly to perform the right action. God is accomplishing a right thing through Cyrus. Cyrus will accomplish the right thing that God wants.

That is odd isn't it? God would never do such a thing would he? Well Christians in the middle east would tell us about a couple of other things God would never do. Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein of Iraq were undoubtedly immoral human beings. They have done horrible things to their people. But both provided a degree of protection to Christians that they would have never received under strict Muslim rulers. God has used those evil men for His purposes for a time. And we think God would never do that. We can ask our brother Steve and he will tell us, yes. God does things like that. Look what else Isaiah says here.

**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.**

But this is the secular world. This is like Hollywood and Washington DC. God is in charge of that as well. I thought there was a battle between good and evil. I thought if we didn't hold our own the battle would be lost. Oh, we don't know anything. God does what God wants when He wants it. He does not need our efforts ever for any thing. That is our God. God is just as much the God of the secular as the spiritual. He is the God of the atheist and the God of the Christian. He is the God of all those who worship false gods. They do not know it and they will receive no mercy for it if they will not worship the true God. But He is God of all men. And every single one will bow their knees before God's son one day and admit that they were wrong. Only **He** is God. I love the story of Joseph. It reminds me of the corporate world. Sometimes it looks like it is only time and chance that lead to falling in and out of favor with the big shots. But we know better. God has a plan. And no one can resist it. They can try. And they may certainly receive the blame for trying. But at the end of the day God gets done what He wants done.

God is directing the way for Cyrus, just like He directed the way for President Obama and now President Trump. None are violating what God intends to accomplish, even if they are all attempting to violate what He directly says. That is how things are working out.

And what will Cyrus do? He will build Jerusalem and he will let God's people go back to their city. Wow. Isn't that what happened from Egypt? It sure looked a lot different in part 1 and part 2. But God is accomplishing the same thing. And it is His power, no matter how He does it.

And let's look at this last little phrase.

**Not for price nor reward**

How much did God have to pay Cyrus to get Cyrus to do His will? Nothing. Zero. Nada.

When Christians enter the world of politics to change the laws of the land, they almost always feel the need to compromise on one thing to get something else. God never compromises. And He can get stuff done without the person even realizes He is doing God's will. Cyrus did what Cyrus did to serve Cyrus. He found that people were easier to tell what to do when they felt like their leader cared about them. Cyrus was still leading the way the world does. He was assigning duties to others. He was not following Jesus model for leadership of seeing needs and meeting them as he was able. Cyrus just found it was easier to lord it over them when they were happy.

Now Cyrus was paid nothing to accomplish God's will. What do we get while we play **our** part by willingly obeying God's will? We get eternal life. Does it not make much more sense to willingly do God's will and receive **a wonderful reward** from God or do His will and receive **no reward at all** from God's hand?

I think a good application for us this morning is to take a hard look at our expectations of God and also those who are in authority over us. How do we jeopardize those relationships by coming up with ways that **they must perform for us to be satisfied**? How do we make ourselves miserable by taking the position of evaluator instead of obey-er.

Have we not gotten to the place yet where we see we can truly trust God? Many of us have been under solid teaching for a long time. Do we get yet that we can trust God to love us without giving Him instructions or guidance? Do we get that God is also God over our secular leaders and bosses? God is in charge of those who are in charge of us. We can have peace no matter where we are. And we have this available to us because our God is the God of everything. And He loves us.