

The Providence of God Our Father

Lord's Day 10

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Bible Text: Isaiah 45
Preached on: Sunday, August 3, 2008

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We read the word of God as we find it in Isaiah 45. Last week in connection to the Catechism, we considered Isaiah 44 and it is fitting that we kind of take up that narrative in Isaiah a little bit, direct our attention to this chapter also. Isaiah 45,

1 Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;

It may be a picture of the gates of Babylon that's being drawn there, but Cyrus the Persian is going to come and conquer the kingdom of Babylon, that would involve also the labors of others like Darius the Mede, but the end in view is, of course, the return from the captivity.

2 I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: 3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. 5 I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. 7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. 8 Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. 9 Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? 10 Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begetteth thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? 11 Thus saith 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 command ye me. 12 I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. 13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways [he now being Cyrus]: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts. 14 Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God.

The direct reference then is to the coming to Israel of the nations, not coming to Cyrus. Cyrus will let the people go, but the effect of it is going to be this, that Israel will be glorified in what Israel's God has done because there is no other God.

15 Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. 16 They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. 17 But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. 18 For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else. 19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right. 20 Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. 21 Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. 22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. 23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. 24 Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. 25 In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

So in this and other passages that we base our instruction this morning as we find it in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 10. Lord's Day 10, continuing now the thought of God's providence which was as our God and Father for Christ's sake, continuing that thought now in the next Lord's Day.

Q. What dost thou mean by the providence of God?

A. The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.

Q. What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?

A. That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move.

The Catechism, as I said, is continuing the thought that the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of the heavens and the earth, is for the sake of Christ his Son our God and Father. We make the confession that we rely upon him so entirely that we have no doubt that he will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body. Now we make the confession too and further that he will make whatever evils he sends upon me in this valley of tears turn out to my advantage for he is able to do it being Almighty God and willing, being a faithful Father. Not only in the earthly sense of the word, fruitful and barren years, sickness and health, come by the hand of God, the things which men call evils in the natural sense of the word, but all the life of men and included in that is also the reality of sin and wickedness, stand under the hand of God.

The passage which we read addresses that subject, uses an illustration first of all in Cyrus and what God's purpose is with him. Now Cyrus is an unbeliever that does not know God at all, and since that truth before us, God is the God who formed the light and creates darkness and makes peace and creates evil, who governs the heavens and the earth in such a way that he is the Maker of righteousness and salvation, and has, in fact, created them, called them into being, it's in light of that that Isaiah gives a certain warning to man who is, as it were, a broken piece of pottery, potsherd, and says to him, "What are you doing when you strive with your Maker?" You and I look at that as children of our heavenly Father, as those who make the confession that the living God is indeed our God. He speaks his word to Israel that they may know him and his word goes forth that even the nations are gathered before him and he can say to us in verse 22, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." For we stand today in the New Testament church, that word goes forth. That word goes forth in such a way that the nations are brought to, as God gathers his elect out of the nations, are brought before him and he says in verse 23, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." That word that the New Testament takes up and applies to the throne of Christ our Savior, he is Lord of lords and King of kings and God shall

fulfill that word when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

It's in that context that we would consider this morning "The Providence of God Our Father," as he is so in Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the one who says, "I am the Savior," and it is that Savior of his people in Christ who governs the nations and rules all things. Consider with me the providence or government of God our Father, first, the fact as it's declared in this chapter; then that it is known by faith, that includes that warning that's in the chapter also; and finally, that it is one that works our salvation.

Providence literally means to foresee and when it's applied to us, it's appropriate. The term as it's used as a doctrinal term includes the fact that God has foreordained and determined the boundaries of life. That's providence is as the Catechism defines it, the almighty and everywhere present power of God. The living God who is the only God and there is none else, and that is Jehovah, the God of the Bible. Just because someone is a monotheist of sorts does not make him a believer in this God, there are other religions that teach the unity of God, there is even an Egyptian king once who said that the sun disk was the only god. It doesn't make one a believer in the God of the Bible. He is Jehovah, the God of Israel who is in Jesus Christ, the one only true God. He and he alone created the heavens and the earth and commanded them and stretched them out and formed the universe for his own glory. He it is who declares, as we saw last time, the end from the beginning; who ordained the ancient peoples and the things that should come in the past, and who has his counsel and purpose concerning the future and what shall be. He is the God who speaks and reveals things to come which no other God or idol of man's invention can do or has ever done. He that knows, and he alone.

As that living God, he at the time of the captivity ordained in his sovereign wisdom that one of the rulers of the Medes and Persians, Cyrus by name, should be the instrument after 70 years of captivity to be the instrument through which his people should return and should go again to Jerusalem and the city should be built and the temple also should be built and established anew. God in his wisdom gives to Isaiah before the very coming of Babylon against the city, gives Isaiah not only to declare these things beforehand but deliberately as he indicates, names Cyrus by name so that when Cyrus is born more than a century later and finally sits upon the throne, people of Israel may take this word to him and show him that he is to be the one to restore the city, who is given the victory of Israel's God, and to let the captives go, and to show him that he was even named beforehand. That would not make Cyrus, of course, a believer but it would have this effect upon Cyrus, that as at least a superstitious heathen, he would fear and would be the instrument according to God's wisdom to send the people home.

Now God can do all of that because he is, in fact, the all-powerful God who is so almighty that when Cyrus' grandparents come together, they have a child and when Cyrus' parents come together, they have a child who is brought into the world in the generations of those households merged, begetting and conceiving children, and they even name their child in harmony, though they do not know God, with the name that God speaks to Israel in the days of Isaiah. God is almighty to that extent that though they on

another part of the earth hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem where Isaiah is prophesying these things, as heathen idolaters who have no knowledge of the living God at all, they are nevertheless so under his almighty power, his sovereign direction and wisdom and purpose in that almighty power of God, that that which God has declared beforehand comes to pass, including the victories that Cyrus will have in the battles he fights, in the conquest of Babylon, and the truth in chapter 46 that the idols of Babylon will not only not save them but that they're going to be loaded on carts and carried off to be melted down for their gold and silver and so on. The life of the nations, the life of man, the life of that child that's going to be born, who is God's anointed or appointed one here, are so under God's power that these things must be.

The word of God uses examples like this to teach us exactly what the Catechism says, that God governs heaven, earth and all creatures. He does not govern them in a kind of loose way so that he simply is making it up or reacting so that he is sort of guiding things, but then all the activities of the creatures are really somewhat independent, with you and I in our experience of government, those who rule over us are at a remote distance and while they have an effect and impact on our life and bounded in various ways, they are not sitting in our house determining what goes on between services this afternoon in minute detail. The idea of the word of God here is that God's government is not that kind of limited human government. God is truly almighty, sovereign, efficacious so that it affects its object, rules in such a way that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, sickness and health all come by the hand of God, not in a vague general way. That's not what the Catechism is saying. The Catechism is saying that these things come by the hand of God in such a way that what's going on in your life personally and mine down to the hairs of our head and the animals even in the forests you and I know not, God knows them, are governed by his hand so that he clothes the flowers with the beauty that they have even if they are growing in some little hidden area that no one sees but God alone, or the deer who wander through the area. God's government embraces everything. It embraces it in a completely comprehensive and inexhaustible way. When God says that the labor of Ethiopia and the merchandise of Egypt and the Ethiopians are going to come to bow before Israel and confess, "Surely God is in thee," then they will do so. When the word of God says and declares that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear or confess, and that specifically that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, it means exactly what it says. Even unto the great day of judgment, there is no man who though he rages against God in this life and despises God and his Christ, who shall not bow the knee before the great majesty of our God because he is God alone and there is, as the passage emphasizes repeatedly, none else. Period.

That truth, beloved, means that what's happening in your life right now and that's true for the children while you're in the home you're in, not another home, why the children are being given us in the congregation and coming into the world and being born, why this child and not another, why a boy and not a girl or a girl and not a boy, why things go the way they're going with you in the troubles you have with conceiving, begetting, rearing, and feeding your children or what have you, all of these things are in the hand of the living God, the Almighty, the Lord of heaven and earth. That one marries and has a large family, another marries and has a small family, or that one has no children, or that

children are long-delayed, or that one is unmarried, these things are in the hand of God. Your work life that goes on tomorrow, why you work where you work, where your boss is, what he's like, the frustrations you have with providing for your family, or the labor you're doing, down to who showed up this morning and who didn't and who is sick and who wasn't, all of these things are in the hand of God. Nothing excluded. And when you begin to ponder that, that is an awesome wonder because it's true for everyone, it's true for you here in North America, it's true for people on the other side of the globe who are in the midst of the night sleeping, or it's becoming Monday morning, given the rotation of the time and the changes and things.

God is God and the problem with treating this whole subject of God's almighty and everywhere present power is not the words but really spiritually appropriating what does it mean that God has all might and strength and power in himself because there is no God beside him, and he stretches out the heavens with his own hand and formed the whole universe whether it be the vault, of the stars above us, or the earth under our feet and he governs it and he rules it and he directs its course in history, declaring the end from the beginning because he didn't just see it, but he ordained it so, and he works it by an almighty power that is everywhere all the time present. Present not like something thin and stretched out, but present because God is not subject to time and space. Present with the fullness of his divine being, filling heaven and earth, the presence of his majesty and glory.

You and I aren't always very conscious of that reality but it is that truth which we really confess here. He upholds, that is he causes the universe to continue to exist. He gives to every creature life and breath whether it be Satan in the garden tempting our first parents, he's there because he continues to exist by the operation of God's almighty power, and God governs the circumstances there so that God's will is realized even though our parents fall by their own act of rebellion, and God rules in heaven and on earth and among all creatures. In the light of that illustration about Cyrus where God says, "I girded thee, I put on your clothes, tighten your belt when you were little child, even," we might apply it that way, "though thou hast not known me." Now God says, "That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the West that there is none beside me, I am the Lord and there is none else." Then he says this and that must be taken in its plain sense, "I formed the light and create darkness," exactly what happened on the first day of creation. God formed the heavens and the earth, the whole organism of the universe as an unformed world mass and it was dark and darkness was upon the face of the whole of the creation. God created the universe and he created it in darkness. Out of that darkness by an act of his creative word, he spake and commanded that there should be what did not exist, light and there was light. "I form light and create darkness." God's sovereign government extends to the formation of his creation to that degree.

It's in light of that that he also takes up that truth and there's a kind of picture in that calling the unformed mass of the universe and its darkness, and then creating and forming the light, there is a picture there that applies to the life of men, the circumstances of men under the sun, and he applies it to the moral issues also of life, and the outworking of them. "I make peace and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things." Now God doesn't do

moral evil but nevertheless according to his purpose to reveal his righteous judgment and to glorify his grace in showing himself as the one who makes peace in the cross, God so forms, governs and indeed calls into existence, creates, the things of this universe that even evil comes into the world by the hand of God, and in such a way that God is not the author of the evil that is done by the moral creatures who do it, but it is there because he is God and he so rules that it comes to pass. He does that in righteousness. He does that in harmony with the whole unity of his one purpose of grace and glory in Christ but he speaks and he says, "I make peace and create evil." When therefore Cyrus comes with war and bloodshed and violence and dreadful violence, when his armies burn cities, destroy homes and men, women and children are slain by the ravages of the war that is coming which will set Cyrus over Babylon so that Israel may return, it is God who sends it and sends the ruler who does it, and it is God who takes that evil that comes upon Babylon and makes it good and turns it to peace and deliverance, the return from captivity for his people.

He is Lord. He is Lord over the fallen angels, he judges them. They cannot without his will move. They act in harmony with their own evil nature but he is God. And that, you understand, beloved, is something that touches the whole of our life also in a rather practical way. You and I live in a rather violent world at the moment and we live in the midst of warfare and the threat and rumor of warfare and violence, of nations that strive with one another, we are in the midst of political campaigns both federal, state, local, and all that belongs to that, and there are things that we are apprehensive about and concerned about and the issues of the day. God is the one although it may involve the voting of the American people and all that's involved in that, but God is the one who is going to put the next President in the White House and he is going to determine the course of events in the Middle East and elsewhere according to his sovereign counsel, and he is the one who sends the tumults and brings forth out of the depravity of man in his judgment the evil that lives in man's heart so that even the wicked things which men do are an expression of the depravity of their own soul, are manifested and take place in history by the hand of God, and he it is who alone can comfort and give peace.

He is sovereign in his providence. That is exactly the point that Isaiah is making here, that everywhere present and almighty power of God is such that truly it is as by his hand that he upholds and he governs, and there is no other God. That brings me, in a sense, to the second point because the response of man to that truth is rebellion, and the response amongst the Christian church today is they don't want to hear that. You know what I'm talking about, whether it's bad things happen but God doesn't want them to and he feels bad like we do, or the denial that God can say without being the author of sin and the doer of evil, that he creates it, calls it into existence under his judgment and under his righteousness, for he says that and immediately says, "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it." There are no contradictions between saying, "I create righteousness and salvation," and saying, "I create evil. Not do evil but I am sovereign over it," and it comes into existence also under the will of God who creates righteousness. You and I may look at that and say, "I don't fully understand how he can bring it all together." It's one of the hardest things to

deal with and preach on, but we take, first of all, what the Scriptures say in their plain ordinary sense, and that is what the text says, it's the word of God.

The world does not want to hear it. The world wants to say, "We are in control of the planet." The world wants to say, "We are the makers and shakers and movers in history and among men and in politics and in government and in buying and selling, and we are going to go and do this and do that and tomorrow and get gain and travel here and accomplish all these great wonderful things by the might of man's power and man's wisdom." Now man is responsible, man is a moral agent, but he's not independent like that. He is under the hand of God and the reality, therefore, is that the Lord answers that and the answer is very similar to the one that Paul gives in Romans when the one says, raises the question in Romans 9, "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" And the answer is, "Shall the pottery strive with the potter?" And it's really the idea here, "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd," that broken piece of pottery, "strive with the [other] potsherds," let men strive with men, but it is the folly of man in his arrogant unbelief to strive with his Maker. It was the folly of the kings of Isaiah's day like wicked Ahaz to do that. He's not describing something simply out there among the heathen, he's describing a spiritual problem in the church. He's describing a problem that shows itself in the life of Israel and so he says, "Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?" Does the clay have the right to say to the potter, "What are you making," and to criticize it, to usurp the authority of the potter over the clay? And the answer is no. One has the authority and the right as Creator of all things to shape, fashion and mold the universe to the end of his own glory. He has the legal right to do it and he is righteous in so doing. His purpose is always in harmony with his holiness and he may, indeed, rule as he sees fit and there is no one on earth who has the right to say unto him, "What are you doing?" And to second-guess, question the wisdom of Almighty God.

He rules. He sends judgments. Men don't want to see those things as judgments whether it be earthquakes or hurricanes or the violence in the earth, or even the working of the depravity of men as it comes expression in the horrors of the day, revealing that man deserves judgment and damnation. God is a righteous judge and he is the sovereign Lord and he forms the clay and he makes the pot that he wants to and he does so because he is God and there is none else, and it can be no other way. The idea that man can somehow live independently apart from the sovereign power of God and determine the course of history in his strength and wisdom apart from God's counsel and purpose or design is to say that man is, in fact, somewhat mighty and that he has a might and power apart from, independent from God. That cannot be. The potsherd, the pottery made out of clay, and the picture here is a piece of it that has been shattered and broken so it's just a little chip, a potsherd has no strength. It's nothing but brittle clay easily broken and crushed. It has no power of its own. What it is, it is by the hand of him who made it.

Wicked men don't want to hear that. They don't want the providence of God and so they not only strive with it but he describes another aspect of that folly, that they deny that it's there at all. They say of the truth of God who formed the heavens and earth and governs them, "That can't be true. He doesn't have any hands. You can't see that. If I make

something, I have a hand and you can see it and touch it and you can see the fingerprints on it. Where is it? I can't see it. You say there's a God, show me." It's that kind of foolishness of a mere piece of dirt, man who was but clay and of the dust of the ground, who because he cannot measure and see with his eye the unimaginable and inexhaustible majesty of God, puts it from him. The word of God says of such a man that he is a fool. "A fool has said in his heart there is no God." That's the point. "Thy work, he hath no hands. There can't be any work, he hasn't got any hands to make anything. It's not God who did this, it's me. I, like Nebuchadnezzar," boasting about great Babylon which he has built, or the wicked fool who thinks his treasures are his own and he heaps and gathers to himself, or the arrogant ruler who thinks that he has set himself in his place by his coming and by his electioneering and by his power upon whatever place of power and authority in government he would occupy. God rules and it's important, beloved, if you get discouraged with the direction of the country and the frustrations with the evil that is done around you, to remember that God is in control. He ultimately is the one who is going to give us the rulers over us whether in wrath or in blessing generally, but he will work what is for the good of his people.

So in light of that that he uses another figure, as if one may go to one's parents and say to them, "Why did you bring me forth into the world?" As if the one begotten has the authority to determine and say to his father who begat him and his mother who brought him forth into the world, "What are you doing?" And to condemn and criticize them when, in fact, they aren't in control of that conception and birth but they are the parents who are to be honored. "What begetteth thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?" As if that foolishness of men that one can determine the events of life. God says, "No, I'm in control. Ask of me of things to come," this is verse 11, "concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me." "Ask and I will tell you. I haven't done this in secret," he says later in the chapter, "I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right." He is God and he is in control of it all and the man who strives with his Maker is the fool.

Now the application of that, beloved, is intended here as a word of comfort, a word of warning, yes, about that striving and that tendency to second-guess and murmur with the way of the Lord, there's a warning there to us but it's intended to speak to us of the great wonder of our God, to speak to us in a way in which we are given to know him because he speaks his word and that word goes forth and it is published in the preaching of the Gospel, and by it we are given to know the living God, to know him as the God of our salvation, as the one who repeatedly declares, "I'm the Savior. I'm the Redeemer." He is going to command and Israel is going to return and the city and the temple will be built. He is the God who can save and deliver, who not only determines the end from the beginning, but in that determination works the salvation of his people.

The truth that God can do that is bound up with the fact that therefore you and I are called to rest in him by faith exactly in the demonstration of his power, in the demonstration and proclamation of what he will do beforehand, and that is part of the argument of this whole chapter. You and I have a refuge that we may run unto and be safe as his people.

The idols can't do that. They cannot save. They cannot hear. Their purposes are no purpose at all. But the Lord God Almighty, Jehovah, the I am that I am, beside whom there is no God, he declares and he governs and he rules and he leads, and exactly in so doing, he's a refuge. His strength is an answer to our need. His wisdom is an answer to our confusion that looks at the world around us and says it's insane. His righteousness is an answer to all the wickedness of men and the evil and depravity that fills the airwaves and the newspapers and that makes us shudder with the horror of what depraved men do and can do, and the evil and wickedness of men. God is in control and he is a righteous judge and he will judge. The blood of the innocents, he will avenge. The blood of those who have been vilely treated shall receive a recompense from the hand of him who is sovereign over all.

He is righteous and holy in all his ways so that you and I need not fear. It's exactly because that all things do not come by chance but by his fatherly hand that you and I looking at these things can be patient in adversity. When things are troubled and the way is narrow and difficult, yes, that sometimes includes chastening, sometimes includes the trial of our faith that it may grow, but also it serves the broader purpose of God in our life and in the life of our households, and in the context of the times in which we live, as God realizes his will which is only good, and you and I may look at it, therefore, and we may say of it, as we did last time, that whatever evils he sends upon me in this valley of tears, he's going to do something with them because he is almighty, he is God in control, but he is also my God and Father for Jesus' sake and in the midst of all of this, I confess not only his power but that all that almighty power is directed towards us in a very specific way, in this, that he loves us and by it all, however much I cannot understand it, he's working our salvation. He is leading us through this life which is a valley of tears because the life of this world under the curse is vain, it's vanity, it passes away. This is not the destination, this is that through which we pass through. The end is eternal glory and the end is a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God, and a dwelling place with God in eternal life in heavenly glory.

How do I know all of that? How do you know those things? Because God's word never returns to him void and he has spoken it and he has done it and if there's any doubt that he has done it, we need but stand at the foot of the cross of Christ our Savior and the wondrous glory of our living risen Lord who is exalted at God's right hand, where God has sworn and he has sworn in fact by himself, another instance where God takes an oath, an oath is that, "The word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness and shall not return," the word has gone forth and it is not going to be changed, "that unto me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear." God is God in Jesus Christ and before the throne of God everyone shall bow. He will judge.

So in the light of that wonder of our faith, you and I have a rich consolation and that has practical significance, it means that I trust in adversity and I learn spiritual endurance, I add to my faith patience. I have to learn like the Apostle Paul in everything to be content. It means that when I abound, I know that it's temporary, that this is, after all, still a vale of tears and earthly riches are deceitful. I give thanks to my heavenly Father who sends a season of prosperity and causes us to abound and we abide content that what may

hereafter befall us, we don't know. We don't know what's coming tomorrow. You might think you do but you don't, and what will come even the next day and in the years ahead. And I don't know. We can sit and fret and worry over them, plan and there is a place for prudent provision certainly for finances and things like that, but you're not in control and all your effort to be in control is foolishness and you know by faith that that's not where your strength lies and your trust must rest in the Lord, so that all things which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust where it's got to go, in our heavenly Father, and our faithful God and Father that whatever comes, nothing shall separate us from his love since all creatures are so in his hand that without his will they cannot so much as move.

That's what Israel facing the captivity and pondering the wonder that God would bring them back, that's what they must do for all the times and upheavals of the days of Jeremiah and of Daniel and Ezekiel, and waiting for that day when they shall come back in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and all the difficulties of rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem. They must look to the Lord. They must look to him ultimately for the one who is coming in whom all those promises should find its center, and that is Jesus Christ. He did that. He fulfilled that word and the end of that word is that every knee is going to bow before the throne of Christ whether in faith in the glory of salvation, or as wicked men on the great day of judgment.

The Lord is going, in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory. It's exactly seeing this that brings the nations here to that they say there is no God beside and there is salvation, and indeed what we are doing today in the preaching of the Gospel is exactly what he says in verse 22, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." The promise, beloved, that God gives unto us is this, that God will give to Israel, and that includes the nations who are gathered into it, who are saved, the nations of them that are saved, God should give to Israel what he describes in verse 17, "But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded."

We have a dwelling place with God, a dwelling place with God, salvation that is eternal and promises that are unbreakable. To underscore that he says that salvation is an everlasting salvation and, "you shall not be ashamed nor confounded," not just for a few minutes but, "world without end." Because he created the heavens and the earth, he is the one also who shall renew them and shall give unto us righteousness and glory, and in him we therefore also glory and lift up our hearts before him.

You and I have a faithful heavenly Father who works our salvation by all the things that come to pass, even the horrors that take place in the world about us. It's hard to understand all of that but God's word says so and he has given us sufficient concrete evidence, a history of his church and his people, that you and I may know it's true. We've seen the end of the Lord with one like Job. We've seen God's dealings with David. We have the testimony of God's word to his people as he brings them out of Egypt and leads them to Canaan. We have Christ, the end of the Old Testament, the consummation and the promise that he is at the right hand of God and before him every knee shall bow.

The providence of God our Father is our comfort. The comfort is not found by denying its scope but by resting in it with childlike trust, confessing that he works all things for our good and resting in that with a simplicity of faith that is a work of grace and not something that you and I have by nature. God sets a passage like this before us to kindle in our hearts that faith and cause it to grow. Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord, our God and Father in heaven, we know that all the way of our life is in thy hand, and that from day unto day it is a spiritual struggle of us to acknowledge it, to walk in it, to trust thy love in the midst of it all. We are weak. Father, forgive us our sin and infirmity in dealing with thy providence and give unto us a growing faith and knowledge of thee and of that peace also which thou dost give through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thou art a faithful Father and we the children of thy love in Christ our Savior. Amen.