

Comfort in the Sovereignty of God (Isaiah 45)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on April 26, 2009

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This morning in God's providence, I want to bring you a message *about God's providence*, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in working all things after His will for His glory and eternal purpose. In the difficult times we live in, I hope this will give you much hope and comfort in the sovereignty of God, that no matter what happens in the future, God holds the future in His hand. Our God is not only aware of all things, He is in control of all things, big and small, good and bad, national and individual, outward and internal, in deepest outer space as well in the deepest recesses of the human heart, whether those hearts believe in Him or not. And perhaps nowhere in God's Word are these truths more clearly on display than chapters 40-48 of Isaiah:

- a section all about the supremacy of God (God is great),
- the supreme uniqueness of God (there is no one like Him),
- the superiority of God (superior to all other so-called gods which are really nothing),
- and the unrivaled sovereignty of God (God is GOD and there is no other).

And right in the middle of this section, in the heart of it, is Isaiah 45. Beginning with the end of chapter 24, and notice the emphasis on God and God alone as the only Sovereign, the only Savior, the only Creator, the only Sustainer of all things, who reigns over, in, through all things.

Isaiah 44:24 (NASB95) ²⁴ Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself And spreading out the earth all alone, ²⁵ Causing the omens of boasters to fail, Making fools out of diviners, Causing wise men to draw back And turning their knowledge into foolishness, ²⁶ Confirming the word of His servant And performing the purpose of His messengers. It is I who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited!' And of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built.' And I will raise up her ruins again. ²⁷ "It is I who says to the depth of the sea, 'Be dried up!' And I will make your rivers dry. ²⁸ "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.' "

45 ¹ Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: ² "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. ³ "I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. ⁴ "For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me. ⁵ "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; ⁶ That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷ The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.

⁸ "Drip down, O heavens, from above, And let the clouds pour down righteousness; Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit, And righteousness spring up with it. I, the LORD, have created it. ⁹ "Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker— An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' ...

²⁰ “Gather yourselves and come; Draw near together, you fugitives of the nations; They have no knowledge, Who carry about their **wooden idol And pray to a god who cannot save.** ²¹ “Declare and set forth your case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? **Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.** ²² “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. ²³ “I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. ²⁴ “They will say of Me, ‘Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.’ Men will come to Him, And all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. ²⁵ “In the LORD all the offspring of Israel Will be justified and will glory.”

Steve Lawson in a recent message summed up this message well:

‘In the midst of dark and difficult times [like God’s people in Isaiah’s day and in ours], it has always been the greatest comfort of believers to rest in the truth of the sovereignty of God over all things. Whether on the macro-level or on the micro-level, we must always realize that God is in control of all things. The Bible says:

- “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens and His sovereignty rules over all.”
- “But our God is in the heavens, He does whatever He pleases.”
- “God is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.”

This is a cardinal truth of which we must be reminded again and again. God holds the entire world in the palm of His hands, and He is “working all things after the counsel of His own will.” God has a plan for human history. He is working that plan every moment and every second of every day.

“He that watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.” This has long been the confidence and the comfort of believers down through the centuries. *Job*: “He makes the nations great, then destroys them. He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.” *The Psalmist*: “The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations. He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation.” ...

- Is God caught off guard by the recent events that have come upon our nation?
- Is God needing to receive daily updates on matters of world affairs?
- Is God having to amend His plans constantly, depending upon what man chooses to do?
- Is God panicked about the stock market?
- Is God worried about the economy? ...
- Are Iraq and Iran forcing God to change His plans?
- Is the threat of terrorism causing God to have to call an audible at the line of scrimmage and to change His call?
- OR Does God have one plan from eternity past, according to the counsel of His inscrutable will that includes all that comes to pass? ...
- Are the democrats now in control? Are the republicans (were they ever) in control?
- Or is it not the One who is the *King OF Kings and the Lord OF Lords*?
- In the strictest sense, America is run by the majority party; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- In our democratic form of government (a government of secondary cause) is a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” But in the ultimate sense of primary cause, it is a government *of God, by God, and for God*, “for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.” ...

I want to help us to understand:

- that God is in control of this mighty nation [and all nations]
- and that God has a purpose
- and that God has a plan for His glory and for the building of His church and for the good of His people

And if we are to be those who are stable in these days and marked by maturity, then we must have our sight on this grand truth.’¹

Friends, if you have a small view of God, if your understanding of God is not the God revealed in this passage and the rest of Scripture, if you believe in a God who is not completely sovereign, then you don’t have the complete God of the Bible and you won’t have the complete comfort of a completely sovereign God -- you have some other concept in your mind fashioned by men.

If we have a weak view of God, our spiritual lives will be weak. If your God is small, your problems will seem very BIG. And no amount of needs-based preaching, problem-addressing preaching will do you much good, because that would just be treating the symptoms of the real problem and the real need which is for God to increase in your thinking and for self to decrease. Man must be minimized and God must be maximized and magnified as the massive majestic matchless magnificent mighty and merciful God.

If God remains small, our problems and struggles will continue to be very big to us, but on the flipside: If we have a BIG God, our problems can and will become much smaller. As our view of God increases, our focus on self decreases, which is a refreshing thing and the best thing for us to do to have our minds off ourselves. The bigger God is, the smaller our struggles and difficulties will be. It’s not that they go away, but when we realize God will not go away, and that He loves us and will help us each day with the same Almighty hands that created the heavens and the earth, isn’t that encouraging to you? We don’t have to let circumstances control us when we trust in the God who is control of all circumstances.

As clearly as anywhere in Scripture, the book of Isaiah teaches that God’s sovereign will and Almighty hand is invincible and effectual and God’s purpose and plan of providence *will be done*, not just for Israel but for everything in every nation, for everything on earth. God is not a spectator with good intentions and desires for this planet but lacking the power to pull it off because of man or Satan. God’s sovereign plans *will stand* and cannot be thwarted.

Isaiah 14:24-27 (ESV) ²⁴ ***The LORD of hosts has sworn: “As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand ...”*** ²⁶ ***This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.*** ²⁷ ***For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?***

No devil or man can hold back God’s omnipotent hand. Period.

Isaiah 40:1 “*Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.*

These words were written to Israelites who would be going through a tremendously difficult time, not only losing their houses as many in our nation have, but they were losing their very land and their nation. They were uprooted and carried off into captivity.

For 39 chapters, especially the prior chapters there has been a lot of woes and warnings and gloom and doom and bad news, until finally chapter 40 turns the corner. The hinge is the word “comfort” repeated 2x. How does God comfort His people?

⁹ *Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is Your God!”* [NKJV “Behold your God!”]

The good news that drives away fear, the way we are comforted, is: “BEHOLD YOUR GOD.”
Look to Him. Focus on Him. Fix your attention on Him. Consider who He is:

¹⁰ *Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him.* ¹¹ *Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.* ¹² *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the mountains in a balance And the hills in a pair of scales?* ¹³ *Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him?* ¹⁴ *With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge And informed Him of the way of understanding?* ¹⁵ *Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust.* ¹⁶ *Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, Nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering.* ¹⁷ *All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless.* ¹⁸ *To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? ...* ²⁵ *“To whom then will you liken Me That I would be his equal?” says the Holy One.* ²⁶ *Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing.*

The comfort God brings is not focused on us, for the simple reason that *it’s not about us!* This comfort is focused on God, which is the most loving thing God can do if His glory is the most satisfying comfort in the universe, and it is. The universe declares His majesty, and this verse calls upon us to lift up our eyes away from what’s going on our little bitty planet; consider the bigness and vastness of the universe and realize that’s just the work of the finger of our God who is far more immense and who is infinitely massive while we are infinitesimal, miniscule, tiny in comparison.

God is so sovereign that not a single one of the trillions of stars in this seemingly endless universe is ever lost track of by God (v. 26). He controls them all and it says He knows each of them by name! Now look at Isaiah 43, where the astonishing truth of God’s sovereignty and care also extends to this little bitty planet, to us!

Isaiah 43 (NASB95) ¹ *But now, thus says the LORD, **your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!***

God’s calling by name expresses authority, sovereignty, and that we belong to Him. He owns us, He knows us intimately, and He formed us for the grand purpose of His glory (v. 7), and He who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it. Fear not.

² *“When you pass through the waters, **I will be with you**; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you.* ³ *“**For I am the LORD your God ...***

God’s most famous attribute is love, and His love is truly amazing. But the fact that He cares for me is not enough to comfort me fully if this God does not also actually have the sovereign power to *take care* of me. Having a God who thinks kindly of me may encourage me some, but having a Sovereign God whose ultimate intention and plan for me cannot be thwarted and whose power is irresistible and irreversible and good – that is where greatest comfort is found.

¹³ *“Even from eternity **I am He**, And there is **none** who can deliver out of **My hand**; **I act and who can reverse it?**”*

No one, no impotent man can hold back the omnipotent hand of God Almighty. His sovereign purpose and plan *will be done*.

Isaiah 46 (NASB95) ⁸ *“Remember this, and **be assured**; Recall it to mind, you transgressors.* ⁹ *“Remember the former things long past, **For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me,** ¹⁰ ***Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’;** ¹¹ *Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. **Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.*****

This is the before-and-after context of our passage, in a section that’s all about GOD who declares and decrees all things that will come after in the future, and who does so beforehand, even as other verses say, before the foundation of the world. Psalm 139 says every day of ours God wrote in His book before our birth!

So leading into Isaiah 45, at the end of Isaiah 44, we see this truth again and again, from before we were born till the end of time. God’s sovereignty extends to:

- our *formation* (44:24 – “the one who formed you from the womb”) – this is pre-natal Providence; cf. Jer. 1:5
- all *creation* (24b “Maker of all things ... heavens ... earth”)
- man’s *humiliation* (v. 25 – He makes false religionists fail)
- His Word’s *confirmation* (v. 26a – fulfilling prophecy, etc.)
- Israel’s *restoration* (v 26b – Jerusalem / Judah to be rebuilt)
- natural *desolation* (v. 27 – God dries up, brings droughts)
- prophetic *revelation* (v. 28ff – Cyrus)

Now you need to understand who Cyrus is and let this hit you:

- this is God speaking more than 100 years before Cyrus is going to be known or come on the scene (it would be like God revealing today the name of the president of a country in the year 2150 A.D. and saying exactly what that man would do to fulfill exactly what God planned to do)
- Cyrus is a pagan Gentile King who does not know at all the true God or His Word but is an instrument of Providence, as in verse 28, God says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.” Not just some of God’s desire, all of it! This ungodly man will be doing his own pleasure and desire with no motive to please the true God, and yet he will be unknowingly and unintentionally actually fulfilling all of God’s pleasure and desire and will!

Some brief and simple definitions of terms may be helpful here:

- *Prophecy* is the going forth of God’s Word, which can include God predicting what is going to happen in the future
- *Providence* is the actual working of God in this sinful world through sinners and nature and in and through all things to produce and orchestrate what will happen in the future. It’s more than just knowing what will occur, it’s God’s actual and active working “causing all things to work together for good to those who love Him” and making all things work together for God’s glory even in and through those who do not love Him.
- *Sovereignty* is closely related to this idea, but is often used in a broader sense to emphasize the ruling authority and Kingship in general, that the Lord reigns, and that God is God, in charge, in control. *Providence* is how He exercises control in the affairs of men to bring His sovereign will to pass as He plans.
- *Revealed will*: What Scripture commands (man can disobey)
- *Sovereign will*: What God decrees will happen (man can’t stop)

One study Bible (*MacArthur Study Bible*) explains it this way:

‘The prophecy—given a century and a half before Cyrus lived and became king of Persia—predicted God’s use of the Persian king to gather the faithful remnant of Israel back to the Land. In this role, Cyrus prefigured the Lord’s Servant, who will shepherd the sheep of Israel in their final regathering (Mic. 5:4) ... [God] refers to Cyrus, as the king set apart by God’s providence for divine purposes. Though not a worshiper of the Lord...’

Another (*KJV Study Bible*) summarizes it this way:

‘This section (44:1–28) contains one of the most amazing prophecies in all of Scripture. In verse 28 Cyrus, the king of Persia, is named as the coming deliverer of the Jews more than 140 years in advance. The structure of the poem in verses 24–28 is arranged deliberately to end with a definite climax, which introduces Cyrus by name. A similar prediction can be found in 1 Kings 13:2, where Josiah is named three hundred years ahead of his time ...’

‘**I am the LORD** stands at the beginning of the final section of this poem and is the subject of all that follows. Nine times in this section the English word **that** is used to identify the activity of the Lord. The passage follows in perfect meter, leading up to the identification of Cyrus by name. Thus it is announced that **Jerusalem ... shalt be inhabited** and that the **cities of Judah ... shall be built**. God will raise up a deliverer of His own to accomplish this astounding deed: **Cyrus ...**

In 539 B.C. [Cyrus the Great] conquered Babylon and decreed the return of the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem and the **foundation** of the **temple** (cf. Ezra 1:2). The discovery of the *Cyrus Cylinder* dating from 536 B.C. further verifies the biblical account.’

Look at v. 28 again, at what the LORD calls Cyrus: “*My shepherd.*” One of the most famous verses in the Bible is Psalm 23:1, “The LORD is my shepherd,” but this is one of the most amazing verses in the Bible where the LORD says this pagan king is “*My shepherd.*” This unbeliever is the LORD’s shepherd?! Yes, in the sense of this text that even an ungodly man over a nation is *God’s man*, the one put in power by the sovereign plan of God who is really the Ruler and King over every nation and individual, whether they acknowledge Him or not.

The word shepherd was an OT term for a leader, and the sovereign God says “He’s mine. I’m in charge of Him and will lead Him in Providence as he leads.” This phrase does not indicate a salvation relationship with God, it indicates the Sovereign relationship God has over humans who think they’re sovereign rulers.

Proverbs 21:1 (NASB95) *The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; [God] turns it wherever He wishes.*

At the end of v. 26, God says of Israel “*I will raise up her ruins,*” and then in verses 28 and following God reveals that Cyrus will be the direct agent used to raise up and rebuilt the nation. The fact that a human being is the direct agent or secondary cause does not change the primary Cause of the ultimate Providence of God in all.

Isaiah 45:1 “*Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus ...*”

This is really astounding, this word “anointed,” used earlier of God’s chosen King of Israel David, and later a title used of the LORD Jesus who would be the ultimate rebuild and restorer of Israel. Romans 13 says even of pagan governing authorities in NT times in the Roman government that all of them are appointed by God, ordained by God to be in authority, instituted by God, and all Christians at all times are to recognize that even leaders and rulers they disagree with are appointed by God and to resist them is to resist God. The only exception Scripture gives in Acts is when authority commands us to disobey God, then we must obey God rather than man. Romans 13:4 says the governing authority is God’s “servant,” God’s “minister,” another astonishing title that is usually reserved for believers but there used of pagan leaders in one of the most pagan societies, under an Emperor who blasphemed God and fed Christians to lions and who would light Christians on fire as torches around his palace at night (no matter what emails you get concerned about our nation, we don’t have it as bad as Christians under Nero, or Jews pillaged and killed and captured in OT times)!

Now look at Isaiah 45:1 again, God says of Cyrus His anointed, “*Whom I have taken by the **right hand** to subdue nations before him.*” This is amazing, as God shows us just how sovereign He is in the affairs of nations and individuals, as the hand of man goes forth, the invisible hand of Providence is actually really at work!

A brother in the Lord a couple of us met down at Shepherd's Conference shared his testimony of how the Lord had saved him not many years ago from a life of drugs and youth culture and sin. His mom got him a bunch of sermon CDs from John MacArthur and put them, I believe, in the visor of his car, and if I remember right, there was one day where for some unexplainable reason his right hand providentially reached for a sermon CD instead of gangster rap or whatever kind of music he normally listened to and he couldn't stop listening. It was the hand of God actually guiding him and he repented of his sins and trusted Christ and then wanted to go to the Master's College (which is quite expensive) and the Lord has provided in His Providence for Him to attend.

I hope the Lord encourages your heart as we continue in Isaiah 45, because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and is always at work with His invisible hand guiding not only big things like kings and nations but in individual lives. If the heart of a powerful pagan King is in God's hand to turn wherever God wills, then how much more those of us "lesser people" who love God and who are His own children. If a little bird cannot land on earth apart from the Father's will, as Jesus taught, and the grass and lilies of the field He is in charge of and cares for, how much more is He in charge of His children, and how much more will He care for us?

I can't improve on the excellent synopsis of the *ESV Study Bible*:

‘Through Cyrus God will demonstrate his own sovereignty over everything.

Isa. 45:1 his anointed ... Here it denotes Cyrus as God's instrument for his purposes, a reminder that God rules all things.

Isa. 45:2–3 The victories of Cyrus reveal God at work in history, accomplishing his own purpose. **that you may know that it is I.** Cyrus himself could and should have acknowledged God on the basis of these prophecies ...

Isa. 45:5–6 Predictive prophecy, fulfilled in history, proves that the Lord alone is God, and he wants the whole world to know it.

Isa. 45:7 Beyond the case of Cyrus, the Lord's creative will and wise purposes stand behind everything. Therefore, his people should not be discouraged when the appearances of history seem contrary to his promises.

Isa. 45:8 Far from a problem to cope with, God's sovereignty over all things, as affirmed in v. 7, is the only hope for the flowering of salvation and righteousness in this world.

Isa. 45:9–13 Isaiah warns against challenging God's right to do his will in his own way.

Isa. 45:9–10 Woe . . . Woe. Putting God under suspicious scrutiny is a serious offense. Created beings may not demand explanations from him (cf. Rom. 9:19–21).

Isa. 45:11–13 The Lord asserts his right to be God. I have stirred him up in righteousness. Cyrus rose up in fulfillment of God's righteous purpose. **not for price or reward.** See Ezra 1:7–11; 6:3–5. With no financial incentive for Cyrus, his support of the rebuilding of the temple had to be of God.’

Ezra 1:1 and following begins by saying the LORD stirred up the heart of Cyrus to make his decree; cf. Prov. 21:1; cf. Pharaoh (Ex. 4-14), Assyria as God's rod (Isa. 10:5-7), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:34; 5:23-25), Caesar Augustus (Luke 2), Pontius Pilate and Herod and pagan authorities and ungodly Jewish leaders together on that Good Friday almost 2,000 years ago, all these sinners doing exactly what their sinful heart wanted and at the same time without realizing it, they were actually doing exactly what God planned and decreed would occur?! How exactly that all works blows my mind but God says it so believe it and be fine with a blown mind!

Listen to how the early Christians in Acts 4 found comfort while under great trials and persecution, when not only their livelihood and living situation was threatened but their very lives (and for Steven in a couple chapters it would cost him his life and later many others). When the government tried to take away their freedom to speak of Jesus and to threaten them, when the disciples reported all the persecutors said, this is how the church responded:

Acts 4:24-29 (NASB95) ²⁴ And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, ²⁵ who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?' ²⁶ 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.' ²⁷ "For truly in this city there were **gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.** ²⁹ "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence ..."

Their confidence and comfort was not in political activism but was in the Providence and plan and purpose of our All-Powerful God and prayer that His gospel will go forth through us with courage.

They didn't blame or focus on man or even demonic activity, even through sinful man and Satan will be accountable to God in the end. The focus of Israel in captivity, and the focus of the early church in persecution, and the focus of all God's people of all times needs to be on the all-sufficient God who is all-sovereign, all-supreme, all-encompassing, all-glorious, all-dominating, all-knowing, all-controlling, all-powerful, and is to be our all in all, always at all times ruling on His throne over all things.

Satan is not sovereign – GOD is. Satan cannot lift a finger or do anything apart from God's sovereign permission and plan, and even when Satan does have it, like in Job 1-2, and incites sinners to attack and destroy Job's possessions and family, when tragedy and natural disaster strikes, Job understood that it was ultimately the sovereign plan of God: "The Lord gave-*the Lord took away*... shall we accept good from the Lord *and not adversity*?" (1:21, 2:10).

This takes us to the deep end of the pool far beyond what I can fully fathom or plumb the depths of, but to follow Paul's pattern in Acts 20, I have to declare the full counsel of God and not shrink back from declaring anything that is profitable.

And all Scripture is inspired and profitable, and this section of Isaiah that begins with “Comfort, comfort my people,” says at the end of Isaiah 45:6: “*I am the LORD, and there is no other. [7] The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity.”*

I don’t know if you find comfort in God only being sovereign over “good things” while bad things are caused by the sovereignty of Satan or sinners or stuff that happens, fate or chance. But that’s now how God’s Word brings comfort. God is sovereign over all.

Theologians are quick to jump in here to clarify that God is not the author of moral evil or the active agent of any iniquity. God didn’t and does not *create* sin, God cannot sin, and God doesn’t cause or tempt us to sin, nor does He commit sin, or condone sin, and yet He causes all things (including sinful acts of sinful men) to work together for our good and His glory. Joseph said to his brothers, “What you intended for evil, God *intended* for good” (Gen. 50:20). God doesn’t merely work thing together for good, patching them up after the fact, He actually intends them for a good purpose.

That’s a pretty big God ... sovereign not only over what we consider good, but all things; darkness, calamity, adversity, taking away of blessings even wrongly at the hands of sinners. That’s the only way there is real comfort in Romans 8:28, that God “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God” – and the next verses go on to define good as whatever conforms us more to image of God’s Son. Whatever God does to make us more like Jesus is good, even the darkest and most difficult times, and if God is not in control of all things including the sinful hearts of sinful men and Satan and all his forces, there’s no comfort in Rom. 8:28.

God is not hamstrung by or having his hands tied by anything. As Luther said, even the devil is God’s servant. And certainly no human ruler in America or Iraq or Iran or North Korea or Russia has God sweating or seeking outside counsel or strategizing Plan B

HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN LIGHT OF THIS GOD?

1. Comfort in God’s sovereignty, don’t quarrel against it (v.9)

God doesn’t want this truth to trouble us, but to comfort us in our troubles. It’s a shame that God’s absolute sovereignty over all things is for many Christians something they angrily argue against and want some credit for something good in their life, salvation, or sanctification. This glorious doctrine should be adored, not argued.

If any doctrine should make us humble and admit we don’t know it all, it should be this doctrine. We should never in pride argue away these truths thinking we know more than God and what He says and that *our mind and how we like to think* determines God’s truth.

Verse 9 says we are the clay and He is the potter – there is a vast difference in understanding between the two that we should be content with and should comfort in. It’s actually a great comfort to me to have a God far bigger than my understanding (and problems)

2. Commit your allegiance to God alone (v. 23b)

“...to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance”

Bow your knee and heart before the Sovereign king in humble lowliness. Commit by grace to greater allegiance and obedience.

If you've never done that, and Jesus is not your Lord, verse 22 is the summons of the Sovereign King of the Universe to you: *“Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.”*

Turn away from your sins and look to Him and Him alone for salvation. Don't look at others who you think are worse sinners than you. Don't look at your good works, don't look at your religious exercises, look in faith to Jesus Christ hanging on the cross, look at your sins being punished on Him there, look at the empty tomb He rose from 3 days after His death for you, and look to Him as your Lord in heaven at the right hand of the Father, the way, the truth, the life; no one gets to the Father but through Him.

3. Be Consumed with this big God, not your fears

Isaiah 40:9 gives *“good news ... do not fear ... Behold your God!”*

Jesus said God's sovereign will not only controls the flight and landing patterns of sparrows but even the very hairs of our head, and then He said, “Do not fear.” (Matthew 10). And John 12:15 says of Jesus: *Fear not, daughter of Zion, behold your King ...*

As you behold your God notice His “I am” and “I will” promises:

Isaiah 41:10-14 ***Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.***¹³ *“For I am the LORD your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you.’*¹⁴ ***“Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel; I will help you,” declares the LORD ...***

Isaiah 43:5 ***“Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, And gather you from the west ...***⁷ *Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory ...*

It's not about us, it's all about God, His name, His sake, His glory. If it was about us, or ultimately dependent on us, we would have much to fear, but I find much comfort in the God-centeredness of God and that a ginormous God is the center of all He does, not me.

²⁵ ***“I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins.***

Isaiah 48:9-11 ⁹ ***“For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And for My praise I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off.”*** ¹⁰ *“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”* ¹¹ ***“For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.”***

God’s glory and sovereignty and supremacy will not be shared, which is actually the greatest news there is, that the greatness of God condescends to help and comfort us little fearful sinful worms and wretches. Not because we’re great, but because God’s great, in spite of us and for His glory, He says **“I will be with you”** [!!]

What a mighty God we serve! What encouragement a BIG God is! What comfort we have in the sovereignty of God! Behold your God!

¹ Steve Lawson, “God’s Sovereignty Over America II,” preached 1/4/2009 at Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, www.cfbcmobile.org