**Isaiah 45:1-7**

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: **2** “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, **3**  I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. **4** For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. **5**  I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, **6**  that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. **7** I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.

**“History In God’s Hands”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, treasure how distinctively God works in the world. Others tried at reform before Martin Luther like John Wycliffe in England or John Hus from Bohemia, but to no avail. Their efforts attacked the kingdoms run by men whereas Luther ultimately found refuge in the kingdom of God. The Gospel that God saves sinners only by grace through faith in Jesus promised salvation not by the sword, but from the assurance of God’s Word. While other reformers demanded revolution or sought to create a Christian kingdom on earth, Luther knew God alone carried the weight of Reformation.

500 years later kingdoms continue to rise and fall, while the Gospel sails its own course. Our Old Testament reading is to bring peace showing that nothing is outside of God’s authority. Isaiah predicted over 150 years prior to his birth how God would raise up King Cyrus of the Persian Empire. The actions of this pagan king were going to set into motion the promise for an enslaved Israel to return to the Promised Land. Scripture no longer gives us names of leaders, because in these New Testament times the true anointed Savior and Lord is Jesus Christ. God delegates some of His authority to be among the kingdoms of man, but He never ceases to be the Lord providing and protecting ultimately His eternal kingdom.

1. **The kingdoms of men exercise authority that God wills to put to good use.**
2. Since God is a God of order, His authority has poured out unto the nations.

* He can use wicked and evil kingdom like Babylon to drag off a corrupt and idolatrous Israel into captivity.
* Likewise, the Lord can use an unbelieving King Cyrus of Persia to restore a broken and abandoned Israel.
* Behind Cyrus’s authority was a greater authority that said, “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron…”
* Secular history records that, “The empire over which Cyrus ruled was the largest the Ancient World had ever seen and may be to this day the largest empire ever.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. At the time of Luther, authority was more than corrupt, but had confused two different authorities.

* Luther called this the doctrine of two kingdoms. A temporal and spiritual authority that come from God, but are distinct.
* As confessed by Lutherans in 1530, “The state protects not souls but bodies and goods from manifest harm, and constrains men with the sword and physical penalties, while the Gospel protects souls from heresies, the devil, and eternal death. Therefore, ecclesiastical and civil powers are not to be confused” (Tapper 82:11-12).
* So rather than one kingdom suppressing or mixing with the other, both were in service to God, but each with a different purpose.
* Believers were under Christ and His Word, while non-believers and believers dealt with God working behind Lawmakers.

1. Today distrust abounds with authority, yet God will carry out His purpose and put it to good use.

* Jesus points to temporal and spiritual authority saying, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”
* God used King Cyrus, “though he did not know him,” but he passed on and his tomb is in a country not praised today that being Iran.
* Temporal kingdoms take up the sword using natural law and reason, but cannot save sinners or change hearts to the Gospel.
* Since government is from God, rather than worshiping the system trust God will put it to good use while we live in the kingdoms of men.

1. **However, the eternal kingdom remains intact because the righteous will of the Lord saves.**
2. God is a God of order, but His authority poured out on the nations has a purpose.

* He told Cyrus the reason, “For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name…”
* The motives of this Persian king were unholy and his nation unfaithful to the true God, but Israel would reap the benefits to return home.
* Cyrus had the victory while God worked His will so, “that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other.”
* Hidden within a redeemed Israel was an eternal kingdom that held the promise of God’s righteous will for the nations.

1. Luther out of the Reformation respected the kingdom of men so long as the Gospel reigned as a kingdom based on the authority of Christ and His Word.

* It meant baptism was not the first step into just other steps to make a person right with God.
* The Lord protected and provided for sinners by what He, “poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:6-7).
* Luther knew God was in control, but the comfort was only in God by the cross making His claim over all darkness and suffering for us.
* The Christian has a dual-citizenship and so Luther says, “If an emperor or prince asks a man’s faith, he must declare it… But if he commands this or that belief I would answer, ‘Dear sir, mind your secular business.’”[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. God anointed Cyrus, but the anointed One from the Father was always to be His Son.

* The exalted place of sinners He has leveled by His place on the cross that was an offense to all.
* He has broken in pieces the doors of judgment so Christ is all about delivering forgiveness to repentant believers now by Word and Sacrament.
* The treasures of darkness are any He has taken into His kingdom of light and so we shine in the kingdoms of men being not ashamed of the Gospel.
* It means obeying temporal authority and serving neighbors in love, but the spiritual authority of Christ shapes us by His eternal kingdom.

There are two very important facts we confess in the creeds. First, “I believe in God the Father almighty.” God is almighty working in the history of men and their kingdoms. This is why we also confess how Jesus Christ, “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” God put to good use temporal authority ultimately to serve His greater purpose. Salvation for sinful humanity had to come by the Gospel. This authority of forgiveness is what Jesus offers now through His Church. In a world of wickedness that challenges authority, rest in God’s promise unchanged for you in Christ. God delegates some of His authority to be among the kingdoms of man, but He never ceases to be the Lord providing and protecting ultimately His eternal kingdom. Amen. Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus\_the\_Great#Dynastic\_history [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. CTQ Dec, 1977, 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)