

More than capable

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[0:00] We're actually continuing in our series in Isaiah.! So we're starting in Isaiah 44 through to bits of 45.! So if you want to turn, it's on page 732.

If you've got a Bible, I know some people prefer to use a phone. By all means do. If you are using your phone, we're in the NIV. We're in chapter 44 and we're reading from verse 24.

Halfway through that chapter. Let me pray for us. Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come to you and we thank you for your Word, the Bible.

And we do pray, Almighty God, that you would speak to us through your Word. We pray for our hearts now and we know there's all sorts of things going on in our hearts and minds.

And we pray that you'd open our hearts, open our eyes so that we could see you clearly and know what you would have us understand about you and about ourselves.

[1:04] And so we ask for that in the name of Jesus. Amen. So it's been a couple of weeks. I was away last week up in Loch Haran, as you know. It's a couple of weeks since we were last in Isaiah.

We're continuing in this series of looking at chapters 40 to 55. And just a reminder of where this is in kind of Israel's history. This is God speaking to exiled Israel in Babylon.

They've been kicked out of Israel for years of going against God's Word, of ignoring His Word. And so God kicks them out and they're taken away by this Babylonian nation.

What we read today, though, after they're kicked out, remember they leave Jerusalem, a burning city behind them, and everything looks terrible. What we read today is exactly what is where Israel were waiting to hear.

It is exactly. What we're going to read is that they'd be returning to Jerusalem. You can imagine, can't you, if you've been kicked out of your city, that the thing what you want to hear, if you've been walking away from Jerusalem with the smell of the smoke of your burning city behind you, when you get to Babylon, what do you want to be told?

[2:19] You want to be told that you're going to be able to go back. You can imagine how this would have lifted their spirits, their destroyed city, their homeland, would once again be teeming with people and with life.

The good old days, you might say, would return. And yet, there is a huge surprise in the verses that we read. God's plan to rebuild Jerusalem will come through the most unlikely of people, someone that no one could ever have imagined, someone that no one would have chosen.

This is how God works. He makes plans that demonstrate who he is and what he's like. He makes plans that demonstrate who he is and what he's like.

This is how God works. By using someone unexpected that no one else would give a second thought to. Or the glory and the fame go to him because of that. People actually come to know God because of the way he does things.

You'll remember perhaps from last time, we saw God was saying there is no other God from him, that he's a sure foundation of no one else apart from him.

[3:24] Now, he's not going to use one of his own people, but Cyrus, the king of a foreign nation, the king of Persia, someone totally left field to demonstrate his power.

What's true of God then is true of God today. That the living God can use absolutely anyone at all.

There is no one that he can't work through. He can do all things beyond what we think is possible. And I wonder, when you think of what is possible, do you find yourself perhaps limiting what you think God can do?

Do you find yourself perhaps doubting the capacity of what the living God is capable of? The opportunity this morning is to reframe our view of God.

It's an invitation to believe that God is capable. He's capable of doing more in our lives, more in this church, and more in the lives of people in our community.

[4:34] We overlook people, and maybe we sometimes overlook ourselves, and it's because we overlook God. God's power stretches beyond the limits we place on him, so that we don't overlook him, so that we can't overlook him.

That's what we're going to see in this passage. Today, let's dive into God's word then. Isaiah 44 from verse 24. This is what the Lord says, your Redeemer who formed you in the womb.

I am the Lord, the maker of all things, who stretches out the heavens, who spreads out the earth by myself, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, it shall be inhabited, of the towns of Judah, they shall be rebuilt, and of their ruins, I will restore them.

Who says to the watery deep, be dry, and I will dry up your streams. Who says of Cyrus, he is my shepherd, and will accomplish all that I please.

He will say of Jerusalem, let it be rebuilt, and of the temple, let its foundations be laid. This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of, to subdue nations before him, and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him, so that gates will not be shut.

[6:10] I will go before you, and will level the mountains. I will break down gates of bronze, and cut through bars of iron. I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

For the sake of Jacob, my servant, of Israel, my chosen, I summon you by name, and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the Lord, and there is no other.

Apart from me, there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that, from the rising of the sun, to the place of its setting, people may know there is none besides me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light, and create darkness. I bring prosperity, and create disaster. I, the Lord, do all these things. You heavens above, rain down my righteousness.

Let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide. Let salvation spring up. Let righteousness flourish with it. I, the Lord, have created it. Woe to those who quarrel with their maker, those who are nothing but pot shards, among the pot shards on the ground.

[7:20] Does the clay say to the potter, what are you making? Does your work say, the potter has no hands? Woe to the one who says to a father, what have you begotten?

Or to a mother, what have you brought to birth? This is what the Lord says, the Holy One of Israel and its maker, concerning things to come. Do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands?

It is I who made the earth, and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens. I marshaled their starry hosts. I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness.

I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city, and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty.

The Lord proves who he is, by doing what only he is capable of. The Lord proves who he is, by doing what only he is capable of.

[8:27] You see with that, you look with me in verse 26, what does he say that he's going to do? Chapter 44, he says of Jerusalem, it shall be inhabited of the towns of Judah, they shall be rebuilt of the ruins, I will restore them.

This is what Israel were longing to hear. And yet, the means God uses are a complete, total surprise. God's chosen instrument is a king, but who has not a drop of Israelite blood.

It will be the king of Persia, Cyrus. Verse 28, we read, who says of Cyrus, he's my shepherd, and will accomplish all that I please.

And he will say of Jerusalem, let it be rebuilt, and of the temple, let its foundations be laid. You notice with me that the words, out of this foreign king's mouth, are exactly the same as what comes out of God's mouth.

What he says in verse 28, is exactly what God says, in verse 26, they shall be rebuilt, I will restore them, the foundations will be laid.

[9:39] We see who he is, in verse chapter 45, we see his commission. Cyrus is commissioned, and he's even called God's anointed, literally, that word for anointed is translated as Messiah, it's pronounced Messiah in the Hebrew.

This is God's Messiah. Almost every occasion, when we see the word anointed used in the Old Testament, it represents a symbolic act, where the Spirit of God, empowers an individual for a divine purpose.

Cyrus, who will never acknowledge Yahweh, the living God of the Bible, he will never acknowledge, and yet he is empowered, by the Spirit symbolic act, where the Spirit of God empowers him, for this divine purpose.

And what will he do? He will subdue nations. He will level the mountains. He will break down gates of bronze. And verse 13, the important thing that he will do, he will set my exiles free.

He will set the people of Babylon, the exiled God's people, who are now in Babylon, in captivity, he will set them free, to return back to Jerusalem. Cyrus, a man who never acknowledges God.

[11:00] God will work through the least expected. He will empower the least expected to accomplish the greatest outcome. And remember, this is prophetic writing.

This was written by Isaiah, before the exile even happened. Isaiah was never exiled. He didn't live during the exile. He came before the exile happened.

All this from Isaiah. Isaiah is given a name by God, Cyrus. Isaiah has no idea who Cyrus was, or who he will be. He didn't know that this would be the future king of a foreign power, who would lead the Persian army to fight against Babylon.

He didn't know that this man, would be the one who would release God's people to re-enter their homeland. And King Cyrus would do even more than he realised.

He would even go on to fund the rebuilding of God's temple using pagan resources. All without knowing that he was being used by God. It's an incredible story.

[12:05] You read it in the detail in the book of Ezra. The question then is why, isn't it? The question is why? Why does Yahweh, the living God, do it this way?

Well, the answer comes in verse 6. So that, from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, people may know there is none besides me.

I am the Lord and there is no other. The living God works in spectacular, unexpected ways so that people know that he could only be the one responsible for it.

And that's not just for Israel alone. You see, God uses Cyrus so that all people, that's what we get from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, that's from the east to the west so that all people will know that he alone is responsible.

It's there to show us that there is no other God that is responsible for leading, for saving Israel out of Babylon. Only the Lord. If I were to tell you I was a surgeon, if I was to announce that I'm, did you know, you didn't know something about me, I'm actually a surgeon, would you let me operate on you based on my word alone?

[13:36] Of course you wouldn't, you'd want credentials and a track record, wouldn't you, to back it up? You don't just let someone cut you open because they tell you. The Lord doesn't just tell us what he's like, but he proves it with divine action.

He reveals himself, his identity, and his character by doing what only he is capable of. When he uses someone like Cyrus, his actions speak.

This is the living God. Only the Lord God could have done this. His power goes beyond what we think was possible. A foreign king, verse 4 and 5, I've mentioned it already, won't even acknowledge him, can't acknowledge him, has no idea that his actions are being used by God.

He thinks he's running the show, and yet the living God stands behind it all. I'm responsible for all of this. I can use whoever I want. I am the Lord who does all these things.

He proves who he is by what he does. He uses Cyrus so that Israel can see there is none besides him. There is no other God but our God.

[14:48] The problem, however, that will come, and remember this is all prophetic, this is Isaiah saying what will come, is that there will be some in Israel who will not want Cyrus.

They will question God's ways, who kind of expect and even demand God to use kind of more conventional means. One that fits a neat and tidy conception of God and his plan, that bears resemblance to something that they can grasp.

who perhaps actually find God's plan to use this foreign king offensive and they argue back, they will argue back with God. We see this in verse 9.

It's almost like they've argued back and we see God's response to them and it is a message of war. You see verse 9? He says, war to those who quarrel with their maker.

Those who are nothing but pot shards among the pot shards on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, what are you making? Does your work say the potter has no hands?

[15:57] Like clay arguing with the potter. You think of the potter. The clay doesn't keep the wheel turning, does it?

The clay can't grasp why it's being pulled and pressed. But the potter does. Every touch of the potter, firm or gentle, is intentional.

God uses the clay how he wants. The whole of creation is the clay, the people. He uses Cyrus however he wants.

He can pick whichever lump of clay he wants to use however he wants. There is intentionality in God's ways that we neither see as other parts of the clay that we neither see nor understand.

And it's the lack of understanding that leads to the lack of approval and offence. And it's why limits are placed on what God is capable of. We're not in geographical exile.

[17:11] We've mentioned that before. And the church is not a nation. But it is made of people from every tribe tongue and nation. And yet we can put limits on God. We lack understanding limiting who and what God can work through.

It perhaps comes out in one of two ways or maybe both. This is how it happens. We either look down on others and say God could never use someone like them.

Too far gone. Too messy. Too engrossed by the world. God could never use them. Or we look inward and say God could never use me.

I'm too ordinary. Too broken. Too far spiritually behind. I don't have anything to offer. The first view looks down on other people. The second one looks down on yourself.

At the heart level what's happening is that we equate earthly productivity, earthly success, with spiritual productivity.

[18:16] We equate earthly maturity with what is spiritual. Both views come from the same heart position. It's a heart that says, I don't believe God's capable of using them, or that he's capable of using me.

the core belief is that what matters to God is what you can do for him. That our good works, our human ability is what matters.

Human productivity, human ability, that's what God looks at. And we think that that should be the means by who God chooses and who he picks to work through.

we think that would be the more conventional means of building his church that fits the categories that we have and the way that we think of that's how God should work to make himself known, rather than using me or using him over there.

The first view says you'll never make the grade, you'll never have what it takes. The second assessment says I'll never make the grade, I'll never have what it takes.

[19:23] Both of these ways underestimate what God is capable of and both reflect the belief that God's power and his ways must fit the way we think. Like a consultant surgeon, knows exactly how to operate as a detailed plan of what will happen in the theatre with great precision.

He will make incisions that would make us squirm. Yet we put our life in their hands because they have everything they need with all the knowledge and experience. The living God has a master plan.

not only for your life, but for the whole of creation. From top to bottom, everything happens with great precision and with great purpose in ways that only he knows.

And that couldn't be more true, couldn't it? What we said, everything that we've said about what God is doing in the ultimate, it couldn't be more true than when we come to the gospel. because if God, if the living God could work through Cyrus to free physical captives from Babylon, how much more can his son Jesus, God in the flesh, free spiritual captives through the cross?

How much more? The gospel, the good news, proves that God is capable of doing more than we could ever imagine or comprehend because the living God has made himself known through his son, much more than he ever did through a foreign king.

[21:00] And there are no limits to what he's capable of. No human ability, position or influence or early success or maturity, that has no bearing on how God reveals himself or who he reveals himself.

So he's capable of making himself known to whoever he chooses because Jesus is the better, perfect, Cyrus. The word for anointed, Messiah, he's anointed with a capital A.

No one expected God to use Cyrus. But neither did anyone expect God to take on a human nature and be born as a baby in a stable. No Israel expected God to re-inhabit, to rebuild Jerusalem using this king that even didn't acknowledge Yahweh.

But neither did anyone expect Jesus the son of God to populate heaven and to build the church by death on a cross. Cyrus defeated the Babylonians by commanding armies, Jesus defeated all sin and evil by laying down his life.

Cyrus was used by God so that people would know there is no other God but the Lord, Jesus is God in the flesh and died in our place that we could know him personally and have the real living relationship.

[22 : 20] Both of these men were chosen but only one of them bled to give us eternal life. The cross levels the playing field. It totally levels the playing field.

However, if you're looking down on yourself or on other people, it humbles the proud. God, you can't look down on anyone but neither will you, you can't look up to anyone either because when we walk through those doors to church as well and when we stand before the living God, we're all equal.

We're all in need of saving grace and the cross proves that he's capable to give it to anyone who turns to him. Capable not by commanding but by sending his son into suffering, by laying down his beloved.

At the cross, God didn't show us he could rescue, he shows us that he would and that he has with love. That love that he has is so powerful, it's powerful even enough to raise the dead and redeem the unworthy.

That is what divine capability really looks like. so in response to the cross maybe we ask, this is the question to ask, if the living God is able to use Cyrus and if he's capable of buying your spiritual freedom at the cost of his son, how much more is he able to use his spirit filled children?

[24 : 02] That's you and me. those for whom the spirit of the living God has taken up residence. What if, what if you were to stop disqualifying yourself, not in theory, but today?

What if you believed that God could speak his grace through you, not despite your weakness but because of it? That you're faltering words, your tired hands and your overlooked presence might actually be the means that God uses to bless other people?

If God can use Cyrus to fulfil his purposes, how much more can he use his beloved child sealed with his spirit? This is the opportunity, this is the invitation to reframe what we think God is capable of.

Think of the most unlikely person to turn to Jesus. God could raise them up and use them to do whatever he chooses. He empowers us to be a vessel, a river of love and grace to people in your life.

It means when you speak hope over a coffee after someone has lost their job, even though you don't know what to say. When you offer prayer to someone suffering, even though your voice is shaky and you've never prayed aloud for someone before.

[25 : 31] When you volunteer to help on a team in church, even though you feel completely unqualified. When you text someone from church just to ask how they're doing and sending it feels awkward.

These are spirit-filled acts. When you're being used by a God who is capable of working through you, sowing seeds of righteousness that will bear fruit and will endure all the way through to eternal life.

You're not too far gone, too weak, too anxious or too unimpressive. He doesn't wait for your perfection. He delights in your availability. You're more than usable. You're chosen to be a blessing in Christ.

This connection to Jesus that he makes you capable in more ways than you could imagine. You're empowered to live a life of Christ-honoring purpose. God is more than capable and he proves it by using sinners like us because only God could do that.

He proves it at the cross but he continues to prove it through the church by using people who maybe we and ourselves would write off and overlook. You can't overlook God because at the cross that's what he achieved.

[26:57] This is the living God. He is more than capable to do more than we could possibly imagine. Let me pray.

Almighty God, we know in our hearts that we sometimes put limits on you and there's times when we don't believe that there's things that you are capable of.

That there are people that we think you could never save. We think of ourselves that we put ourselves down. We think you could never use us. And so Lord, I praise you that you don't wait for us to be perfect but you work through us in small ways, in big ways, in lots of ways, Lord.

The way that you use us because you empower us by your spirit. And I pray that you would, where we've had disbelief in this area, unbelief, where we've lacked faith, I pray that you'd strengthen us and grow us.

And I thank you that in Christ we are qualified. And so I pray for your blessing upon us, use us mightily for your name, for your praise and for your glory.

[28:19] We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.