

The Lord Is God; There Is No Other

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0:00] Well, church, would you turn with me to the book of Isaiah, chapter 44. We're picking up in verse 24. That's page 567 in the Pew Bible.

And then we're going to look at the rest of chapter 45 this morning. So, end of 44, beginning of 45, page 567 in the Pew Bible. Let me pray, and then I'll read the first part of this for us.

Father in heaven, as we come now to your word, we pray that you would give us eyes by your spirit to see Christ in his glory. We know that all of the prophets testified to him, and it is him that we need to see.

So, come and do that work, we pray, God. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen. All right, Isaiah 44, verse 24.

Let me read for us. Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb. I am the Lord who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish, who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, she shall be inhabited, and of the cities of Judah they shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins.

[1:33] Who says to the deep, be dry, I will dry up your rivers. Who says of Cyrus, he is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose, saying of Jerusalem, she shall be built, and of the temple your foundation shall be laid.

Continuing in chapter 45. 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.

I will go before you to level the exalted places. I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hordes and secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by name.

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. I am the Lord, and there is no other.

Beside me there is no God. I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there is none besides me.

[2:49] I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness. I make well-being and create calamity. I am the Lord. Who does all these things?

We will end our reading there and pick up in a little bit. So there is an old parable that goes something like this. There is a group of blind men standing around an elephant, and each one is trying to give a description of what this elephant is like.

One man touches its trunk and says that it is a snake. Another feels its ear and says, oh, it is like a fan. A third man holds the tail and finds it rope-like.

And the last man feels the tusk and declares that the elephant is like a spear. Now, this parable is supposed to illustrate the idea that all religions are equal but limited paths to God.

According to this parable, every religion is sort of like a blind man only feeling one part of the elephant. And so, according to the parable, no one can say that there is only one true religion.

[4:02] No one can say that there is only one true God. Now, on the surface, that parable can seem appealing, right?

After all, isn't it sort of arrogant to say that your God is the only true God? Isn't it better, we sometimes think, isn't it more humble to say that we're all just blind men grasping our part of the elephant?

And so, when we come up against a text like Isaiah 44 and 45, it can really rub us the wrong way. Because the big idea of this section in Isaiah, not just the part I read, but the whole chapter that we'll get to a little later, the big idea here is that the Lord, Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the only true God.

If you look with me down at the passage, if you have it open, you'll see this affirmed again and again in our text. In Isaiah 45, 5, we read, I am the Lord and there is no other.

Beside me there is no God. 45, 6, I am the Lord and there is no other. 45, 14, the nations say, Surely God is in you and there is no other God, no God besides Him.

[5:22] 45, 18, I am the Lord and there is no other. 45, 21, and there is no other God beside me, a righteous God and a Savior. There's none beside me. 45, 22, for I am God and there is no other.

The Lord, the God of Israel, the God of Jesus Christ, alone is God. In other words, the Bible makes the exclusive claim to being the one true version of spiritual reality.

The Lord, the God of Israel, alone is God. There is no other. But how can we believe something like that in our incredibly pluralistic age?

I mean, after all, aren't we just blind men around the elephant? How can anyone make an exclusive claim about the one true version of spiritual reality? But here's the thing.

This parable about how all religions are relative, did you know it's actually doing the exact same thing? That that parable is making an exclusive claim to be the one true version of spiritual reality?

[6:33] I mean, think about it. After all, the narrator of that parable, the one supposedly telling that story, they aren't one of the blind men, right? They see the whole thing.

They see the whole elephant. Telling that story, believing that version of reality is presuming to see the whole thing and to see it truly.

You see, to say that all religions are just blind men feeling an elephant is to assume that you can see the whole reality, even though other people might not. It is no more or less exclusive or presumptuous than a religion claiming to be the one true religion.

In fact, you might even say it's a bit more disrespectful, not to mention patronizing, to people who see things differently than you. Let me give you a somewhat trite example.

Imagine you're sort of stumbling upon a few friends, and they're debating whether the Yankees or the Red Sox are the greatest baseball franchise in history. Now, some of you might not give a rip about baseball. I don't actually like baseball, but just go with the example, okay?

[7:38] And you listen to your friends for a while, and eventually, you know, after hearing the sort of debate, you say to them, you know, friends, you're just both blind men grasping an elephant.

I mean, how patronizing of a thing to say, right? To say that all religions are relative, to say that you cannot claim one religion to be the true religion, is in essence to say that all religions are wrong, and you have finally gotten it right.

It might just be the most arrogant position of all. Now, I say all that to say that we can't just dismiss out of hand this big idea of Isaiah 45, that the Lord is God and there is no other.

Are you willing to entertain that that might actually be true? Everyone makes a stake on what exclusive spiritual reality is like.

Why not consider that one too? Now, how does Isaiah demonstrate this here, and then what are the implications of believing something like that? In other words, well, is that true?

[8 : 50] And if so, so what? Well, there are lots of ways that we could approach the claim that the God of the Bible is the only true God, and the Bible comes at that question from a lot of different angles, but Isaiah's main demonstration here, his main sort of proof, if you were, that the Lord, the God of Israel, is the one true God is this.

And we see this again and again in Isaiah 40 through 55. This people of Israel were in slavery in Egypt. He said he would liberate them, and he did. When the people were in exile in Babylon, he said he would liberate them.

That's what Isaiah 40 through 55 is about, and he did. And you know, those two great acts of redemption in the Old Testament, they sort of unfurl like banners across the whole of the Old Testament, saying, consider this God.

Look at what he's done. Could any God do something so great? And this great God says, yes, it's true.

I am God, and there is no other. Your Creator and your Redeemer. And of course, as we go into the New Testament then, that same pattern continues.

[10 : 04] When Jesus arrives on the scene, proclaiming the arrival of God's kingdom, He tells the people that He will liberate them. And He does. He says, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

And then He says, I'm going to be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes and the Pharisees to be crucified. But in three days I will rise. This is what Jesus said to His disciples, and that's what He did.

He was crucified, and three days later He was raised to life. And it's this same Jesus who said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father but through Me. The unique work of Jesus, laying down His life, doing what no one else has done, then paves the way for this claim that He is the one way to God.

The incarnation of the one true God. This is the message of the New Testament. There's only one true God, and the Lord, Jesus, is His name.

[11 : 14] Now, if you're here and you're exploring Christianity, if you're kind of new to spiritual things and you're trying to figure out what you believe, you know, the best way you can do that is by reading the historical accounts of Jesus for yourself.

Figure out for yourself if this Jesus is who He says He is, who others say He is. Read the accounts for yourself and ask if He's worthy of your trust.

Consider the historical claim. Did He really rise from the grave? It might surprise you how plausible and how life-giving the real Jesus really is.

In fact, every person should figure out for themselves what to make of Jesus Christ. You know, don't just go along with the herd or the popular opinions on social media. Be authentic.

Where do you stand? What do you think of Him? Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Muslims believe that Jesus didn't actually die but was sort of taken up to heaven.

[12:18] Jews and atheists and agnostics for that matter believe that Jesus died and remain dead. You know, only one of those can actually be true. Where do you stand?

Do you have the courage to figure it out for yourself? Even if you've grown up in the church, don't simply believe because your parents believe.

Seek Him out for yourself. But what are the implications then? What are the implications of believing that the Lord alone is God?

Well, there are at least two implications here in Isaiah 44 and 45. And the first half of our passage that I read for us shows us this, that because the Lord alone is God, we must honor Him for all common grace.

Because the Lord alone is God, we must honor Him for all common grace. Let me briefly explain how we see this in our text. What's going on in the end of Isaiah 44 and the beginning of Isaiah 45 is that the Lord is saying, in my sovereignty, I'm going to use Cyrus, the pagan ruler of Persia, to come and free my people from their Babylonian exile and rebuild Jerusalem.

[13:37] I'm going to use Cyrus, a pagan ruler, to come and free my people and bring them back home. Now, that message, of course, would have been a source of scandal to some of God's people, right?

How could God use Him? And it probably would have been a source of doubt to others, thinking, you know, well, look, if Cyrus is the liberator, perhaps Cyrus' gods are better than our God.

But no, says the Lord. The good that Cyrus does is because I, the Lord, did it through him. Look at verse 5.

Speaking to Cyrus, God says, I am the Lord and there is no other. Besides me, there is no God. I equip you, though you did not know me.

The good that Cyrus accomplished, it wasn't ultimately Cyrus' doing. It was the Lord's doing. As the one true creator and ruler of all, God was the one who was equipping Cyrus to do what he did.

[14:44] And friends, that is true across the board. And the theological term for that or word for that is common grace. That God showers His gifts on the just and the unjust.

He gives innumerable blessings to both believers and unbelievers. And in His sovereignty, He brings about His good purposes. We see common grace pretty clearly in the physical realm, right?

God makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good. He makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. But we see it in the intellectual realm. God gives gifts of reason and learning.

He sheds them abroad to all humans that we might understand the world and make something of it. We see it in the creative realm.

God gives gifts of art and music. We see it in the moral realm. God gives a sense of justice and compassion. And He does all of this to believers and unbelievers alike.

[15:48] Every good and every perfect gift is from above, James says in the New Testament, coming down from the Father of lights. Or as God says here in Isaiah, besides me, there is no God. I equip you, though you do not know me.

So don't be surprised, God says to Old Testament Israel, when Cyrus liberates you. This is my doing. It is my common grace, working through Cyrus for your good.

And for us today, don't be surprised if you listen to a piece of music composed by an unbeliever and find yourself in genuine wonder and joy. Common grace.

Don't be surprised if you find incredibly kind and loving people outside the church. Common grace. Don't be surprised if social good is at times advanced by unbelieving people.

There is common grace. But notice, what's the point of seeing this common grace? Look at verse 6 of our text, that people may know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there's none beside me.

[17:02] I am the Lord and there is no other. You see, when Cyrus liberates the Jews in exile and sends them home, who is meant to get the praise? Cyrus? Cyrus? Cyrus is God's?

No. No. The Lord. The sovereign giver of all good gifts. When we see God's common grace, we must give God the honor for it.

Now, the doctrine of common grace helps us to avoid two pitfalls in the Christian life. On the one hand, you know, the Israelites could have rejected the good that Cyrus brought about because Cyrus did not worship the Lord.

They could have viewed everything he did as evil, right? They could have said, I'm not going to take any gifts from him. I'm going to just stay in Babylon. You know, Christians sometimes fall into this same pitfall.

We must not reject the good things that unbelievers do as totally evil just because they're unbelievers. We can still acknowledge the good and give God the praise for it.

[18:09] On the other hand, the other pitfall, you know, the Israelites could have swung in the opposite direction. They could have viewed what God did through Cyrus as proof that all of Cyrus' actions and even Cyrus' gods were worthy of praise and worthy of allegiance.

Now, Christians today, I think, have to be even more careful of this pitfall. When we see some genuine good in an unbeliever, or in a social movement, or in a political party, we must not suddenly give it our wholesale allegiance.

We have to be more discerning than that. Just because we see a threat of common grace good doesn't mean we should give our wholesale allegiance and agree with everything that particular person or party or movement stands for.

Rather than rejecting everything and accepting everything, we need to honor God for the good of common grace but think and act with integrity as God's people.

The Israelites were meant to go home but they weren't meant to start worshiping the Persian gods. Now, that's the first implication of Isaiah 45 because the Lord alone is God.

[19:28] We must honor Him for all the common grace that we see and experience. But at this point, Isaiah has to make an important clarification. God has just said that He's going to use Cyrus, a pagan ruler, to liberate His people.

What does that mean about Cyrus? What does that mean about all those nations, all those people who, like Cyrus, don't worship the Lord? Well, the second half of Isaiah 45 tells us this.

Because the Lord alone is God, we must turn to Him for all saving grace. Because the Lord alone is God, we must turn to Him for all saving grace.

Now, let's skip down to verse 18 in chapter 45. We're going to read a little more of our text. Picking up in verse 18 of chapter 45. For thus says the Lord who created the heavens, He is God who formed the earth and made it.

He established it. He did not create it empty. He formed it to be inhabited. I am the Lord and there is no other. I did not speak in secret in a land of darkness. I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, seek me in vain.

[20:35] I, the Lord, speak the truth. I declare what is right. Assemble yourselves and come. Draw near together, you survivors of the nations. They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols and keep on praying to a God that cannot save.

Declare and present your case. Let them take counsel together. Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other God beside me, a righteous God and a Savior.

There is none beside me. Turn to me and be saved. All the ends of the earth for I am God and there is no other.

By myself, I have sworn from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return, that is return void, return empty. To me, every knee shall bow. Now, every tongue shall swear allegiance.

Only in the Lord it shall be said of me, our righteousness and strength. To him shall come and be ashamed all who are incensed against him. In the Lord, all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory.

[21:47] Now, the key verse here is verse 22. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.

Friends, you see, common grace, those gifts that God sheds abroad, common grace is not saving grace. You can be highly intelligent, very creative, incredibly moral and all these are gifts of God.

You didn't earn them, they were gifts to you. But even an abundance of these gifts of common grace, they aren't saving. They don't put you in a right relationship with God, with your Creator.

They don't take away your guilt. They don't take away your shame. We need saving grace. And what do we see here?

We see that this one true God, who yes, covenanted with Israel to bring about his plans of redemption, who sent Jesus Christ, we see that this one God, what does this God do?

[22:53] He extends not just common grace to the nations, but he extends his saving grace as well. Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth.

Here is an invitation, a summons for everyone. Every nation, every culture, every language, everyone is summoned to receive God's saving grace.

That was true in Isaiah's day and it's true today, friends. He is summoning us, he's summoning you today to come and receive his saving grace.

But to receive this saving grace, what must we do? We must turn, Isaiah says, we must turn and embrace the Lord alone as God. because ultimately this is the God, as verse 23 says in our text, to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance.

There is coming a day, God says, when everyone will recognize my unique and utterly exclusive claim to be the one true God. Everyone will acknowledge it.

[24:06] God is inviting us, he's summoning us to acknowledge it now. And that phrase, you know, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance, I hope that phrase sounds a little familiar to you because earlier in our service, Dave actually read for us from Philippians chapter 2 and in that chapter from the New Testament, Paul identifies none other than the risen Jesus as this Lord.

At the name of Jesus, Paul writes, every knee should bow in heaven and earth and under the earth and every tongue confess, that is, swear allegiance that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

To turn to the Lord and be saved means turning to the Lord Jesus. But what do we see about this Lord Jesus?

This sovereign Lord who stretched out the heavens, who established the earth, this one true God who rules the nations, what do we see about this God? Well, we see that this is a God who emptied Himself for us.

Listen again to Philippians 2. Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant.

[25 : 31] Being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. I recently ran across the story of Praveen Setupati.

He's a genetics professor at Cornell. And when he was a freshman in college, a classmate asked him what he believed and he said he was a Hindu.

But the question kind of unsettled him. Praveen's parents had immigrated from India. He had grown up with Hindu culture, but he had little knowledge of Hindu beliefs, so he started to explore.

He kind of dug into ancient Hindu texts and he appreciated their richness. But the process made him aware of the fact that other world religions made different truth claims.

Now, with the mindset of a budding scientist, he didn't want to assume that the religion he inherited was right, so he explored other beliefs and read other religious texts. And in the Gospels, as he tells his story, Praveen found something that surprised him.

[26 : 41] He, here, in the Gospels, Jesus. Jesus was the supposed hero of the story. But at the climax of the tale, this Jesus was hung naked, disfigured, and pathetic on a cross.

Very different than the Hindu superhero, Krishna. But somehow, the self-emptying of this crucified man attracted Praveen.

And after months of reading and questioning and sifting through the evidence, he started following Jesus. Now, as you might guess, this was a little more, was more than a little disturbing, right, for Praveen's family.

Living as members of a racial and religious minority in America, they feared that Praveen was rejecting his Indian heritage and wondered whether he would change his name to something Western-sounding like Peter or John, right?

But Praveen reassured them that following Jesus did not entail rejecting the culture he loved. He writes, becoming a Christian had nothing to do with rejecting my Indian heritage or being called by a different name. Rather, it was about embracing God's interwoven presence in the history of mankind, Christ's love and sacrifice for us and our desperate need for Him.

[28 : 00] Now, there were certainly aspects of his Hindu heritage that he would need to leave to follow Christ. But Praveen was proud to be Indian and proud of the rich culture which he came from.

And he was planning to pass it on to his children. So, you see, turning to the one true God, Jesus, means turning to the God who emptied Himself for us, something that no other religion claims.

And turning to Jesus didn't mean sort of erasing all the common grace good that's found in our culture or in our heritage, but rather bringing all of that, bringing all of those gifts in worship of the God who gave those gifts in the first place.

How about you, friend? Have you turned to this God to receive His offer of saving grace? And if you have, are you using all of your gifts to bring Him praise?

The Lord alone is God. Honor Him. Turn to Him. Let's pray. Try and God, we thank You for clearly revealing Yourself to be the one true God.

[29:27] And we give You praise for doing what no other God claims to do, taking on flesh for us, laying down Your life for us, rising again that we might know new life.

Oh, Lord, help us now to turn to You and help us to honor You. Help us not to see the good gifts that You've given us as somehow things we have earned or things we have done or things that might puff up our own pride, but help us to see them as vehicles for giving You praise and displaying Your manifold mercy and wonder here in this world that You've made.

Help us by Your Spirit to do that, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.