

The Destination Matters (August 31, 2014 Isaiah 44:6-46:13)



I suspect that you have heard this quote or a variation of it many times:



It's the journey that matters, not the destination.

The idea is that life is short – we should enjoy the journey – don't focus too much on the destination.

I want to suggest that this is absurd.



Ask the people on the Titanic whether the destination matters or not.

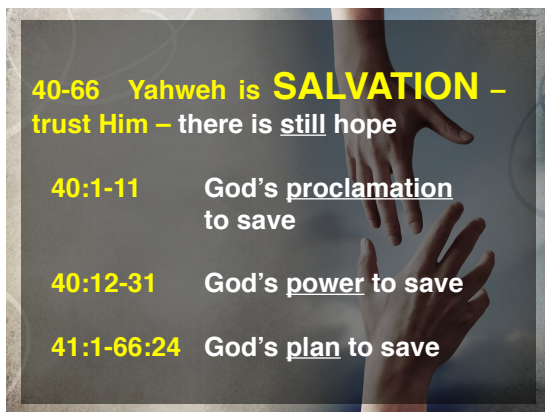
It absolutely matters!

The journey of life does have a destination – heaven **or** hell – and believe me it matters!

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?

The problem is that our hearts want a comfortable journey – but God who knows the beginning from the end – gives us the journey we need to get us to the destination of heaven.

A great lesson Judah had to learn – and we have to learn is that while the journey is not unimportant – *it is the destination that **really** matters.*



We are working our way through the book of Isaiah and we are in a long section that deals with God's plan to save.

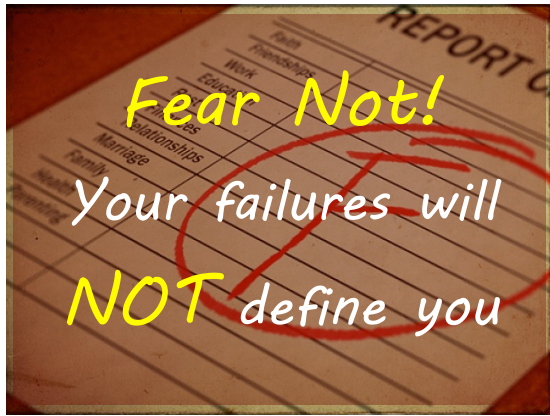
This section springs out of a debate between God and Judah as to whether sending Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Judah and march the few survivors off into captivity is an act of callous disregard or of sovereign love.

The Lord's opening address said this:



Fear Not! Have faith that I have a plan that leads to your good and to My glory.

Last week we saw this:



Fear Not! Your failures will NOT define you.

Israel failed in so many ways. But God's message of hope for her and for us is that ultimately it will **not** be our failures that define us – but the saving love of God in Christ.

Today, the message of our passage is this:



The destination matters, not just the journey.

To see how this fleshes out, turn with me to Isaiah 44:6-9.

These first three verses provide a summary of the three chapters we are going to look at this morning.

I am going to spend a fair bit of time in these verses because the next three chapters summarise the same points.

So look with me at Isaiah 44:6:

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."

God is the King – the Sovereign Lord over Israel.

He is the One who can redeem His people – He can save them.

He is the Lord of hosts. This is the term used when God brings the armies of heaven to fight for his people.

The point is that in order to save His people, God will bring every resource of heaven.

This brings us to *two key statements*:

I am the first and I am the last.

I am the first – could be talking about God’s importance or power. But when He says – *I am the first and I am the last* – it is a poetic way of saying God is beyond the boundaries of time.

He was there before the world existed – *the first* – and He will be there after it is gone – *the last*.

I believe it is impossible for us to fully grasp what this means. We are linear beings.

We only exist in the now.

Our yesterdays are gone and are unchangeable – our tomorrows are yet to come and are unknown.

This is **not** true of God.

Time as we know it is merely a part of His creation.

God spoke – the heavens and the earth came into being – and time began – and when the world ends – time will end.

For us who live in His creation – time just seems to flow forward.

But for God – all of history – from creation to the new creation – is ever before Him.

Adam, Moses, Paul, Luther, you – all exist together before Him.

We are not to think of God as being in heaven and simply moving along in time with us.

God is the first and the last – He exists outside of time – but also He is inside **every** moment of time.

This allows Him to order every moment of time according to His plan.

This means that the things we think should not happen to us – such as exile in Babylon – such as getting cancer young – losing our jobs – are all a part of God’s greater plan. Nothing happens that is outside His control.

I am the first and I am the last.

What this conveys are words such as:

Creator, Immortal, Eternal, Timeless, Sovereign

The idea is that God is capable of directing all of history for His own ends.

That is why as we work through these verses you will notice phrases such as this:

I **declare** the end from the beginning.

Not – I *know* the end from the beginning as if I merely know how history will unfold – but I **declare** the end from the beginning – I **decide** how history unfolds.

God orchestrates history for our good and for His glory.

He makes sure that for His people the journey ends in heaven.

But many times that means the journey does not go the way we might want it to.

When Jim Elliot and the four missionaries with him were killed at a young age – the world said – tragedy – God must have been looking the other way.

Isaiah says – no it is a part of the sovereign plan of a God who works all things together for good.

Before God spoke – and anything existed – He had determined **everything** that would happen.

For example – passages such as 1 Peter 1:19-20 tell us that in order to save His people, God had determined to shed the blood of His Son Jesus before the world began.

This is beyond our ability to grasp.

Science fiction writers love to argue about time paradoxes and whether history is fixed or malleable.

But theologians also have questions.

Questions like – if God determines everything – are my choices real – am I just a puppet – how can God hold me accountable? – and a thousand more.

I don't pretend to know all of those answers. I am content to let God be God.

What I do know is that the One who created everything – declares that He determines history – **and** He says – Craig Lloyd – you are not a puppet – you get real choices **and** you will be held accountable for your choices.

I just figure if God can create everything – He can work it such that this is true.

Why is this important?

In terms of our lives – God’s ultimate focus is the destination. He plans to save His people from sin, to make us His, to bring us to heaven.

The journey is not unimportant – but God knows what we need in the journey. That can be suffering – tragedy – discipline.

The journey can take turns we would never choose.

But what Isaiah reminds us is that the Almighty has every moment of our lives in His control.

For Judah – the journey got really rough – Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple shattered, the leaders and most of the people killed – and the few survivors were carted off into exile.

They were not enjoying this journey and they were complaining to God – bitterly.

God wants them to know – this journey is all a part of His plan to refine and save His people.

Please – do not get me wrong this morning.

I am not saying the journey does not matter at all. It matters a great deal.

But having a comfortable journey – the kind of life we might want – may not be the best for us.

God gives us what we need – not what we want. He is focused on the goal of saving His people.

I am not saying we should never pray and ask God for a smoother journey – but we should accept no for an answer.

Jesus asked for the cup to be removed – but it was the will of God to crush Him.

My point is that ultimately, we need to trust the One who shapes history – that He will shape it for our good and for His glory.

This leads us to the other key statement:

Beside Me there is no god.

You are going to see this come up again and again in this morning’s passage.

On one level you wonder how God can say this. There are thousands of gods in the world.

What He means is that there is no one, no power, no force, no god – who determines history – who shapes your future – who can ensure your destination is heaven – apart from the one true Creator God who exists outside of time – who is the first and the last.

Why is this important?

We live in a world filled with gods and idols. And these can be anything that we rely on in place of the true God.

Ultimately the great question of life comes down to this:

Who will you trust your eternal destination to?

I want to suggest that we basically have two options.



Man or God.

So what does it mean to trust your eternity to man?

It means you put your hope – in yourself or in someone else – or in something that ultimately derives from man.

We can trust our eternity to:

Human power

Money, science, medicine, government.

Human wisdom

False gods, false ideologies, false religions, false philosophies.

Or some decide there is no hope and look to dull or stop the pain through:

Human escapes

Sex, drugs, pleasure, suicide.

But ultimately these all prove hollow hopes.

None of these can *guarantee* eternity.

Apart from the one true God there is no other god or power or force than can truly help our tomorrows.

Some of those things might give you some peace. Some of those things might take your mind off your troubles for a few minutes.

It is amazing the lengths that some will go to searching for hope for eternity.

Some like Hall of Fame baseballer – Ted Williams – have had their bodies – or in some cases – just their heads – cryogenically frozen with the hope that one day science might advance to the point they can be revived.

These are incredibly tenuous hopes.

And none of these hopes have any guarantee.

In contrast, God gives a guarantee about the destination.

Verse 7:

Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.

God does not just say – trust Me – I got your tomorrows.

He says – throughout history – I have told you what will come to pass.

And as you look back, you know it has come to pass.

So when I tell you what I am going to do tomorrow and into eternity – you should trust Me.

Israel of all people must know this.

When God called His ancient people – Israel – way back in Genesis 15 and 17 – He spelled out in detail what He would do. When Israel was nothing – just one old, infertile, pagan man – Abraham – God laid out His plan.

He would make them into nations and kings. He would give Israel a land to live in. And He would bless them by sending Messiah to save them.

He determined the shape and destiny of the nation.

Now the Lord says – if you want to trust anything else with your eternity – how about they put their evidence of history shaping on the table?

Where are their prophecies that came to pass?

What are their prophecies about tomorrow? Show Me!

Verse 8:

Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.

Fear not! I chose you – I loved you – I laid out My plan for you.

The plan I laid out for you does not end in Babylonian exile. The plan is for you to return to the land so Messiah can come.

I plan to save you – eternally!

You have every reason to trust Me. What have I promised that has not come to pass?

Fear Not: I control your destiny.

Let me pause for a moment.

Here we find a key doctrine in Isaiah and indeed of the whole Christian faith.

Christianity **is** based on faith. But it is **not** a faith that is without proof or substance. Do not let the sceptics tell you your faith is based on nothing more than wishful thinking.

We have the evidence of creation and providence, we have Scripture, we have the work of the Holy Spirit, we have the testimony of the church, we have miracles, we have the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – but one of the most powerful evidences that the Lord is the true God – the Creator – that He can save us – that we should trust Him – that He controls all of history – is predictive prophecy.

This shows that God is indeed outside time *and* that He determines history.

There is a theology that swept through many churches a few years back called ‘the openness of God’. Basically it says the future is open – even to God. God doesn’t know what will happen tomorrow.

God knows what He wants to happen and is powerful and tries to shape history to go where He wants – but there are no guarantees.

Wow!

That is in no way the God of Scripture. That is in no way the God of today’s passage.

A God who cannot direct the future is **not** a God you can trust your life and eternity to. Who knows where your life will end up?

But as far as I can tell – the god or gods of no other religion **guarantee** the future.

A few have made some vague prophecies and then backed off because they didn't even come close to being right.

The Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists do not like to talk about the long, long lines of failed prophecies in their history.

Muhammad made a number of prophecies that failed to come to pass.

Not our God! Not the God who is the first and the last.

I am told that there are approximately 2500 prophecies in the Bible. Around 500 of these refer to events yet to occur. But the other 2000 have been fulfilled – many in incredible detail.

The prophecies about the first coming of Jesus and His death are very detailed and were fulfilled perfectly.

But one of the other major areas of prophecy the Lord gave detailed predictions about has to do with the salvation of Judah from the exile in Babylon.

Isaiah wrote the words we are looking at somewhere around 700 BC.

Jerusalem fell in 586 BC and the exiles began to return somewhere around 537-538 BC.

Isaiah prophesies about events 100-150 years after his death with *incredible* accuracy.

He tells of the decline of Assyria and the rise of Babylon. He prophesies the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah at the hands of Babylon.

He then records a prophecy for those who will go into exile.

How can those exiles in Babylon **know** that they can trust God with their eternity?

God says – look at My past record and as well, I will give you a prophecy for the near future. I decree that I will save you from exile.

How? God lays it out in detail.

Persia will rise. She will have a King named Cyrus. He will overthrow Babylon and free them to return to the land.

These details are so exact – even naming the Persian King before he had been born – facts that are verified by history – that no one can doubt this is a miracle – **if** it was written in 700AD.

But some simply cannot accept this and say – of course it is impossible to decree the future, so someone must have written this after Israel returned and attributed it to Isaiah.

There are a couple of problems with that.

First, every scrap of archaeological and historical evidence we have is that Isaiah wrote the whole book in the 8th century BC – **before** these events happened.

Second, what you will see is that God repeatedly says I am telling you this **before** it happens that you may judge whether My words come to pass.

For example – Isaiah 41:25–26 – says – I am telling you about Cyrus that he will save you – before it happens – that you may know you can trust Me.

What would you think if a cult leader stood up later today and said this:

That you may know you can trust me with your lives – I am going declare what is to come, and what will happen.

Wait for it. ... I declare that an unknown Senator called Barack Hussein Obama will rise to take the Presidency of the US.

You would rightly say – so? We know this – it already happened.

And what if he said – yeah but I knew it twelve years ago – really I did – so trust me with your life!

Yeah right.

The book of Isaiah makes no sense unless it is written **before** the events come to pass. If it suddenly appeared years later – no one would give it the time of day.

But that is not all.

When we get to chapters 52 and 53 – we find a detailed description of the crucifixion and death of Jesus in 30 AD – which is well over 700 years after Isaiah wrote.

No one tries to say these chapters were written *after* the fact since we have copies of Isaiah from **before** the time of Jesus.

This is a problem for sceptics because the prophecy of Scripture is clear and detailed.

Let me ask you this question. Who is the most famous pagan prophet?

Michel de Nostradamus.

But his prophecies were so vague – no one has a clue what they mean – and you can find a way to apply them to anything.

Here is one of his more famous quatrains.



The year 1999 seven months
From the sky will come the great
King of Terror.
To resuscitate the great king of the
Mongols. Before and after Mars
reigns by good luck.

The year 1999 seven months.
From the sky will come the great King of Terror.
To resuscitate the great king of the Mongols.
Before and after Mars reigns by good luck.

What would be good luck is deciphering this gibberish. Men have read anything and everything into this.

Not so God. His prophecies are clear and testable.

For example in regard to delivering Judah from exile, He named Cyrus – before he was born. He said he would overthrow Babylon, free the exiles, return them to their land and help them rebuild the Temple.

Crystal clear prophecies.

Here is the point. The incredibly exact details of Cyrus *and* Jesus are written so that **we** would **know** that God decrees history – so that we would **know** that His promise of salvation **will** come to pass – so that we can put all our cares and anxieties on Him and trust Him with our tomorrows.

But here is the ludicrous thing.

Despite the mountain of evidence – most men still place their trust in something else – some idol.

To understand the next couple of chapters we need to understand the **hierarchy of creation**. The hierarchy is this:



God ... made ... man. Man ... made ... idols.

God the One who knows the end from the beginning made man from nothing. He controls every moment of his destiny.

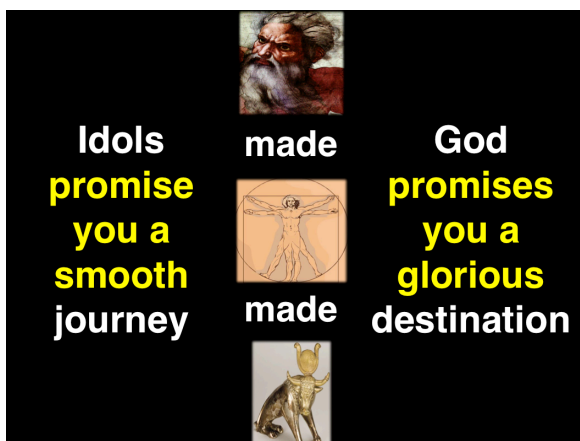
Man then takes some of the created world God gave him to enjoy and fashions it into an idol. Some wood, stone or metal.

But incredibly – when trials come – when the journey gets bumpy – many men – even Christians – turn to the low man on the hierarchy of creation – idols.

Basically they are trusting some glorified pet rock.

Why on earth would they do this?

Here is the basic reason:



Idols promise you a smooth journey

God promises you a glorious destination

This is the siren call of idols – you can have a better life **now!**

The idols – whether it be religion, money, sex, ideologies – they promise you a smooth journey. A better life **now!**

Again I want to tell you that they can't deliver that – but it can look like it.

The exiles of Judah were in Babylon – the power centre of the world.

Babylon had conquered the known world and they credited this to their gods – in particular Bel and Nebo.

Bel was the patron-god of Babylon, the king of the gods and determiner of the destinies of nations. Nebo was his eldest son, the secretary of the council of gods and custodian of the Tablets of Destiny.

They seemed to be providing a pretty good destiny for the Babylonians.

You might look at the situation Judah is in and think – Bel has won – Yahweh has lost. So get on the Bel bandwagon.

We are no different. We look at the world.

We see people with money and gorgeous women and flash cars and they seem to be loving life.

Government, science, medicine – they seem to offer firm hopes.

Islam looks like it is doing well

And so we begin to wonder if we should trust our futures to these puny glorified pet rocks.

That would be a mistake – an eternal mistake of epic proportions.

This is the point of the next three chapters.

Here is how these chapters look.

Idols are puny and man made. They cannot save you. 44:9-20

God is Almighty and made man. He can save you. 44:21-45:25

Idols are puny and man made. They cannot save you. 46:1-2

God is Almighty and made man. He can save you. 46:3-4

Idols are puny and man made. They cannot save you. 46:5-7

God is Almighty and made man. He can save you. 46:8-13

Isaiah makes the *exact* same points over and over to help them get into our hard hearts.

But since the points are the same – it is probably easier if I just put the **two points up**.



Idols are puny and man made. They cannot save you.

God is Almighty and made man. He can save you.

First, **Idols are puny and man made. They cannot save you.**

It is insane to trust your tomorrows, your eternity, your life – to puny gods.

Have a look at chapter 44:9-20.

Isaiah describes how idols are made. Ironsmiths, carpenters, metalworkers.

Notice the ironies.

The ironsmith gets hungry and thirsty making the idol – but the idol can't help.

A man cuts down a cedar tree – half of it becomes firewood to bake bread – the other half becomes his god.

Look at verse 17 – having made his god out of the excess wood – he bows down, worships it and says – *Deliver me, for you are my god.*

The question crying out here is – are you insane?

God made you. He made the cedar tree you cut down. Half the wood warmed you, cooked your bread, helped you. And then you carve an idol out of the other half –and now you want to ask it to save you?

Why would anyone do this?

In our enlightened western world the easy answer is that he is just a superstitious primitive who wants to believe in a higher power.

No. They were not the total gullible fools we like to think.

Truth is we all have our idols that we think can save us – even in our enlightened western world.

Money, medicine, government, science, education.

We all have our escapes to ease the pain – sex, drugs, food.

In some sense we all have our idols we bow down to even when we know they cannot save us.

Look at verses 18-20:

They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. ... Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Men worship idols because their hearts are blind to the truth.

Any objective person should be able to say – this is no god – it is just a block of wood. I am holding a lie in my hand. If this is a god – it is a puny god.

I apologise in advance – but every time I think of how puny and pathetic these gods are – I cannot help but think of this scene from *The Avengers*.

Puny gods!

Truth is a carved idol is far more puny than Loki.

But in reality – every idol, every false god is – puny. It **cannot** save.

You know it is a sad day when the Hulk has more discernment about these puny gods than many men – but their eyes are blind and their hearts deluded to the truth.

What is the truth?



God is Almighty and made man. He can save you.

First He says – ***I will save you from sin 44:21-23***

God formed His people. God will **not** forget them.

And He blots out our transgressions – they turn to mist and are gone.

No so-called God can do this. Salvation is found in no one else.

Let me ask you a question:

When you pray – do you spend more time asking God for a comfortable journey or for a glorious destination?

Do you spend more time praying about money, and family, and work than praying – Father – how can I thank you for blotting out my transgressions.

A comfortable journey might seem nice – what we need is salvation.

Don't turn god into an idol.

Don't just ask him for stuff for the journey.

Ask Him to empower you for the fight and to use you to save souls.

Unfortunately, of all the things people worry about – standing before Him who can cast body and soul into hell – is often low on the list.

In fact it is the greatest concern they should have.

But for those that know God – He has redeemed us.

We should be joining the heavens in songs of praise.

Then comes a section in which the Lord says:

I will save you from exile 44:24-45:13

What I think the Lord is doing here is a couple of things.

First, He is saying – it is not that I don't care at all about your journey – and to shoe you this – I will save you from exile.

But *second*, so that you may know I **can** save you from your sins – I will save you from exile.

It is a bit like when Jesus said to the paralytic – that you may know the Son of Man has the power to forgive – sins – take up your mat and walk!

In verses 24-28 the Lord tells how He will deliver Judah.

I chose you and loved you. I delivered you from false prophets and sent true prophets.

I will return you to Jerusalem. The city will be rebuilt and the Temple rebuilt.

But then comes verse 28:

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.' ”

Cyrus? Who is Cyrus?

The Jews would have been scratching their heads. Shepherd was a term used of the kings and leaders of Israel – so who is this Cyrus?

It is a prophecy. He is the one who will fulfil God's purpose in freeing Judah, sending them to rebuild Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

Here is how exact this prophecy is. In Verse 27 we read:

Be dry. I will dry up your rivers.

When Cyrus attacked Babylon – we wondered how he could ever breach their defences.

A historian called Herodotus tells us. He diverted the Euphrates river that ran through the centre of Babylon. When the river was dried up – his men entered under the walls of the city through the dry river bed.

Chapter 45 verse 1 is an incredible verse.

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus.

See that word – anointed – it is the word – *Messiah*.

In the Greek translation it is – *Christos* – Christ.

God calls a pagan King – His Messiah – His Christ.

Why? Because He is the one God is sending to save His people.

He will be God's instrument to save them from exile.

Cyrus will conquer Babylon and free the exiles.

God told them ahead of time that He would do this. Why?

Verse 3:

That you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

Verse 5:

I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.

Verse 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.

I told you this – that you may know – I am God – and I have the power to save you.

Verse 7:

I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.

God is not just sovereign over light and well-being. He is sovereign over darkness and calamity.

I create the times of light and the times of darkness.

I send your trials and joys.

I give you what you need – not what you want.

I sent Nebuchadnezzar to discipline you.

I will send Cyrus to free you.

I the Lord do this – not any god or King – I do it. It is part of My plan.

Verse 8 – Just as I send trials and joys – so I send salvation and righteousness.

I save you from exile so you may know I save you and make you righteous.

Then comes these challenging verses. Verses 9-11:

Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'? Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'With what are you in labor?' " Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: "Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands?"

We have seen the picture of men creating idols.

Here we have a picture of a potter creating a pot – but the potter is God and the pot is us.

When Judah is whining – you messed up in sending us to exile – it is like the clay whining about what kind of pot God is shaping it into.

Seriously, how insane would it be for the clay to demand of the potter how it is to be formed?

Stop ... stop... stop. You might be the potter – but it is my life. I want handles. I want pretty blue glaze. I want to be pot for honourable use. And I won't stand for anything less.

The clay does **not** tell the potter what to make.

The potter alone shapes the pot.

God alone shapes our lives. And He shapes them for good.

He decides – persecution or peace. Calamity or calm

He decides if you are born in war-torn Iraq or safe-haven Indooroopilly.

He decides if your journey is rough or smooth.

And He shapes it for good and He shapes it such that you get to your destination – heaven.

If God sends me through life as a pot without handles – but I get to heaven – is that really so bad?

Far worse to be a pretty blue pot with handles and go to hell.

The truth is only God knows the beginning from the end and knows what is best for our lives.

We know this, but it doesn't stop us from questioning the way God is running our lives.

There are aspects of my journey so far I would have changed at the time. I have had some hard events in my life and in the lives of people I love. But God – My potter – knows I need these – to shape me and to work all things together for my good.

When I was a 23 year old medical student and had been a Christian for only a matter of months, I was getting changed in the operating theatres and a surgical registrar said – I don't like the look of that spot on your back.

He took it off the next day and sent it to pathology.

It came back as a level 2 melanoma.

That night I spent some having things out with God.

I asked the Lord what the deal was? How come a melanoma straight after getting saved? Did He save me only to then take my life? I was just about to graduate as a doctor – didn't He want me to serve Him?

I remember reading big chunks of the Bible. I can't tell you for sure if I read Isaiah 44-46 that night – but I do vividly remember that what I read brought me great peace.

I realised God controlled my destiny. He loved me and was absolutely sovereign. My life was in His hands and they were good hands. Whether my journey was a short one or a long one – God had saved me and my final destination was assured.

I often think of Romans 8.

God predestines us to glory. But the journey can be rough. At times we are in tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword – at times we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

But this is the plan of God – to make us conquerors – and none of these twists in the journey can separate us from the destination of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verses 12-13. I am the Eternal Creator – I know what is best.

In this case what is best is that I stir up Cyrus to set you free.

But know this – delivering you from exile is not the final plan.

My final plan is that – **I will save nations from sin 45:14-25.**

The false gods are local gods. They fight for their people.

The Lord created the earth and every nation and His plan is to save people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

God will bless Israel and nations will see a glimpse of the glory of God.

Look down to verses 22-23:

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: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'

In verse 20 – God addressed the nations and told them – you pray to gods that cannot save.

Now He says – turn to Me – **I can save.**

I delivered My people from exile – I can deliver the nations from sin – so turn to Me and be saved.

Notice that God does not simply save everyone. He saves those who turn to Him – who declare – You are the true God – You are My God – I turn from My idols and sin to You – there is no God beside You.

One day every knee will bow and swear Him allegiance.

One day – all of those who refused to yield their idols – will see the true God and will be forced to acknowledge – You are the true God – my idols have failed.

But this forced confession comes too late.

What saves is turning to God and crying – You are My God.

If there are any here who do not know the Lord – know this – you can turn now in faith while you can – or one day you will be forced to kneel when it is too late.

The destination matters – and who you trust to get you there matters.

Idols are puny and man made. They cannot save you.

Look at chapter 46 verses 1-2.

Here we meet Bel the determiner of the destinies of nations and Nebo the custodian of the Tablets of Destiny – but they are puny gods thrown on the backs on beasts of burden and when the beasts tire – they can't even save them.

They can't control their own destinies let alone the destinies of others.

I don't know if we are meant to laugh or cry.

God is Almighty and made man. He can save you.

Look at these great verses. Verses 3–4:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and **will save**.

While Bel and Nebo need to be carried by donkeys – God carries His people from the cradle to the grave – and He will save us.

Idols are puny and man made. They cannot save you.

Verses 5-7.

A goldsmith makes a god. But it is puny.

Men can carry it around. You set it down it can't move. It can't speak.

It can't do anything. How could you ever think it could save you?

Again – laugh – cry – weep. It is pathetic.

God is Almighty and made man. He can save you.

Look at verses 8-11:

Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old – **remember how I guided Israel and determined her destiny.**

For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country – **the bird of prey from the east is Cyrus – the man of God's own counsel. Just as I saved you in ancient times – so I will save you now.**

I have spoken, and I **will** bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I **will** do it.

The One who is the first and the last – sovereign – almighty – He accomplishes His purposes.

He sends Cyrus.

Why?

Verses 12–13:

Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory."

I will save you from exile so that all may know the One who sent Cyrus to save His people from exile is the One who sends Jesus to bring those far from righteousness near – to put salvation among His people.

The destination matters – so turn to Him and be saved.

Brothers and sisters – I know you would like a comfortable journey. My heart wants that too.

But God is greater than that. He knows what we need. He gives us what we need – to shape us, refine us, remove the dross of our lives, to make us holy and turn out hearts to Him.

And when we finally get to heaven – when the journey is done – we will praise Him for the incredible wisdom and love that guided our paths from the cradle to the grave and on to eternity.

Don't trust puny gods and idols who can't save. Don't believe the lies that they can make your journey comfortable.

Trust Him who is the first and the last, the only true God – the One brings righteousness near and puts salvation in Zion.

The Destination Matters

(August 31, 2014 Isaiah 44:6-46:13)

Main Point:

The destination matters, not just the journey.

Read Isaiah 44:6-46:13

- When people say - **It's the journey that matters, not the destination** – what do they mean? What is the problem with this thinking?
- In what ways does our journey matter?
- What does it mean that God is the first and the last?
- In what ways is God outside of time? In what ways is He involved in time?
- What are the implications for God directing all of history?
- Does God's determination of history mean we are puppets without choice and not responsible for our actions?
- What are the idols we can be tempted to trust our eternity to?
- Why is this such a temptation – even for Christians?

Application: What idols are you drawn to trust and what do you need to do about it?

- Why can God guarantee our destination?
- What proofs does He provide that He will keep His word?
- What is the role of prophecy in boosting our faith?
- What proofs do we have that Isaiah's prophecies occurred prior to the events they speak about?
- Compare biblical prophecies to Nostradamus or groups like the JW's? What does this do to your faith?
- What are the problems with those Christians who believe the future is open and not settled even to God?

Application: How can you apply the facts of prophecy to help you have faith when tough times come?

- Discuss these statements:

Idols promise you a smooth journey

God promises you a glorious destination

- What drives men to worship the puny idols they make with their hands?
- What areas do Christians struggle in?
- Why is the destination so important?

Application: When you pray – do you spend more time asking God for a comfortable journey or for a glorious destination?

Do you spend more time praying about money, and family, and work than praying – Father – how can I thank you for blotting out my transgressions.

- Why did God choose to save His people from exile?
- In what ways is Cyrus God's shepherd and Messiah?
- Chapter 45:7 – why is it important to realise God is not just sovereign over light and well-being. He is sovereign over darkness and calamity? How can we learn to rejoice in both?
- Chapter 45:9-11 – why do we dare to tell God to run our lives? What would happen to us if God allowed our lives to go the way we want?

Application: How can we learn to accept the life God sends – light and dark?

- What does it mean to turn to God and be saved?
- Why is it too late by the time every knee is forced to bow?
- Chapter 46:1-7 – What is the comparison we are to understand between God and idols.
- Chapter 46:8-13 – How does the sovereignty of God over history relate to salvation?

Application: How can we learn more of the greatness of God and the puniness of idols? How can we learn to trust the One true God?