

Someone Knows What's Going On...

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Title: Someone Knows What's Going On...

Text: Isaiah 44:28

Thesis: Seeing what God has spoken in the past about our present and the future helps my faith grow stronger.

28 When I say of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd,' he will certainly do as I say. He will command that Jerusalem be rebuilt and that the Temple be restored." (Isaiah 44:28 NLT)

Introduction:

I love the Bible. I have been reading it for nearly sixty years. For the first nearly 40 of those years I read it in the King James Version. I did this because all the Christian people I associated with believed that if the King James Version was good enough for Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and the Apostle Paul, it was good enough for us. **There are some real advantages to reading exclusively from the King James Version.**

- It makes it easy to memorize scripture. Less to keep track of.
- It sounds really holy when it is read or quoted.
- There's quite a bit of it that is harder to understand than if you were reading a modern translation, so you have an excuse if you don't want to do what it says.

Anyhow, in 1980, Jean and I committed to reading through the Bible every year. We were moving to a new city, in another state, to launch into a completely new ministry, so we thought, "Hey, let's see how this reads in another translation!" Imagine! What a sense of adventure! (Slightly guilty feeling, what if we get one of those "liberal translations" that really isn't accurate and true to the original texts?) Yikes! That's scary!

But we went to the local Bible dealer and test drove the New American Standard Version and a whole new chapter (if you'll pardon the expression) of my life began. Since then, I must confess, my brand loyalty has gone right out the window. I went from the NAS in a few years to the NIV and from the NIV to the NLT and (I know, it's a slippery slope!) this year to (wait for it..) The Message! So there you have it. How the mighty have fallen!

Actually, I've become kind of a new translation junkie. Not just gulping down words indiscriminately because they're new, but I learned that over-familiarity produces a kind of "auto-pilot" attitude and approach to actually grasping and applying God's Word to my life. So every time I commit to my daily reading from a new translation, the familiar is out the window and I actually have to think about what I'm reading.

Disadvantages of translation transfer:

- Memorization. Most of what I have in memory is in KJV.
- Being able to find a verse because I know exactly where it is on a page.
- Underlining and writing in the margins of my Bible.
- I actually have to change my attitude and actions because God uses a fresh presentation of a truth to whack me up side the head and say, "No more excuses! Do it!"
- **I can live with it.**

The Bible is one of the key elements in establishing my faith in God and keeping it strong and healthy.

We've recently been reading through the Old Testament Book of Isaiah in our Ready, Set, Go daily readings.

Isaiah's prophecy is one of the best sections of the Bible for me to read to be encouraged that the Bible is really true and that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and that it is God's Word to us.

Isaiah wrote prophecies about a king named Cyrus (Isaiah 44-48), ruler of a nation that wasn't even a world power in Isaiah's day, who would destroy the Babylonian Empire (which was not yet the dominant world power, but soon would be) and free God's people of Judah (who were not yet in captivity) from exile in Babylon and return them to Judah and Jerusalem. The really cool thing is that he wrote all this more than 130 years before it happened.

28 When I say of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd,' he will certainly do as I say. He will command that Jerusalem be rebuilt and that the Temple be restored." (Isaiah 44:28 NLT)

13 I will raise up Cyrus to fulfill my righteous purpose, and I will guide all his actions. He will restore my city and free my captive people—and not for a reward! I, the Lord Almighty, have spoken!" (Isaiah 45:13 NLT)

Isaiah 45:1-7 is actually written to Cyrus. It was when Cyrus read this section of the Hebrew prophetic writings, written by Isaiah about 130 years earlier – naming him by name, that he ordered the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem (See Ezra 1)

1 This is what the Lord says to Cyrus, his anointed one, whose right hand he will empower. Before him, mighty kings will be paralyzed with fear. Their fortress gates will be opened, never again to shut against him. 2 This is what the Lord says: "I will go before you, Cyrus, and level the mountains. I will smash down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. (Isaiah 45:1-2 NLT) 3 And I will give you treasures hidden in the

darkness—secret riches. I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name. 4 "And why have I called you for this work? It is for the sake of Jacob my servant, Israel my chosen one. I called you by name when you did not know me. 5 I am the Lord; there is no other God. I have prepared you, even though you do not know me, 6 so all the world from east to west will know there is no other God. I am the Lord, and there is no other. 7 I am the one who creates the light and makes the darkness. I am the one who sends good times and bad times. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things. (Isaiah 45:1-7 NLT)

Isaiah 48:14-16

14 "Have any of your idols ever told you this? Come, all of you, and listen: 'The Lord has chosen Cyrus as his ally. He will use him to put an end to the empire of Babylon, destroying the Babylonian armies.' 15 I have said it: I am calling Cyrus! I will send him on this errand and will help him succeed. 16 Come closer and listen. I have always told you plainly what would happen so you would have no trouble understanding." And now the Sovereign Lord and his Spirit have sent me with this message: (Isaiah 48:14-16 NLT)

Isaiah 46:10

Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish. (Isaiah 46:10 NLT)

Explain the significance of all this..

Let me show you how this looks on a timeline..

740-681 BC – Assyria was the world power, actually the first "World Empire." Babylon was as yet an unknown little country in Mesopotamia. The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the **Assyrians** in 722 BC. Isaiah's prophetic ministry in Judah spanned the reigns of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah.

Jeremiah 626-585 BC – Babylon had suddenly risen to power under Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Assyrians, and taken over the Empire, increasing in size and power phenomenally. The Southern Kingdom of Judah falls to **Babylon** in 586 BC. Jeremiah's ministry spanned the reigns of Kings Manasseh, Josiah, and Jehoiakim of Judah.

"The truth is that you will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. (Jeremiah 29:10 NLT)

Daniel 605-530 BC – Taken to Babylon in the exile at the fall of Jerusalem and Judah. Daniel was a young man at the end of Jeremiah's life and ministry. His life of service to the kings and his prophetic ministry spanned the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar of Babylon, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, and Darius of Media, Cyrus of Persia.

2 During the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, was studying the writings of the prophets. I learned from the word of the Lord, as recorded by Jeremiah the prophet, that Jerusalem must lie desolate for seventy years. 3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I wore rough sackcloth and sprinkled myself with ashes. (Daniel 9:2-3 NLT)

Cyrus took the throne of the Persian Empire, read a prophecy in an ancient Hebrew manuscript about himself probably handed to him by his Chancellor Daniel, and did exactly what God had said he would do.

1 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy by stirring the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation into writing and to send it throughout his kingdom: 2 "This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem in the land of Judah. (Ezra 1:1-2 NLT) 3 All of you who are his people may return to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you! 4 Those who live in any place where Jewish survivors are found should contribute toward their expenses by supplying them with silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a freewill offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem." (Ezra 1:1-4 NLT)

7 King Cyrus himself brought out the valuable items which King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods. 8 Cyrus directed Mithredath, the treasurer of Persia, to count these items and present them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of the exiles returning to Judah. (Ezra 1:7-8 NLT)

Application:

The Bible is God's Word. I believe it to be God's Word and I use it for the purposes God gave it. Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16, *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right."* (2 Timothy 3:16 NLT)

God didn't have to foretell the precise details of King Cyrus restoring the Jews from exile and the details of Christ's suffering and death hundreds of years before they happened, but I'm really thankful that he did. It is a real encouragement to my faith.

As I mentioned earlier, I decided to believe in God and in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, a long time ago. But I live in a not very faith-friendly world. So I need all the help I can get to keep my faith alive and growing.

Here's how this helps me:

Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish. (Isaiah 46:10 NLT)

I don't want the world I live in to be a world where no one knows what's going on and where no one is really in charge. This reminds me that God knows what's going on, what's going to happen, and that he is really in charge.

Building a growing, lasting, livable faith-house:

- **The Bible is foundational – know what it says and believe it.**
- **Discipleship is building the house – growing, applying, obeying.**
- **Experiences with Jesus are the furnishings that make it home.**

Here's how it works for me:

- I read the Bible.
- I think about what I read.
- I write journal entries about what I read.
- I talk with others about it.
- I pray about its application to my life.
- I look for at least one practical thing I can do right away to apply it.

But sometimes I don't understand it.

- Sometimes I question it.
- Sometimes I doubt it. **Did you know that only believers have doubts?**
- Sometimes I do understand it but I don't want to do what it says.

I go back to the basics – to the beginning – to my point of reference.

- I decided to believe and I decide again to believe, today, right now.
- I renew my commitment to be a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Christ, and I act like one.

Look at this thought from our RSG reading a few days ago:

*14 Then Jesus became explicit: "Lazarus died. 15 And I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't there. **You're about to be given new grounds for believing.** Now let's go to him."* (John 11:14-15 The Message)

Do you see it here? Something goes wrong, something really difficult takes place, and Jesus says, "Follow me right into this situation that seems hopeless and dead and what happens next will give you new grounds for believing. A fresh reason to believe. But you've got to follow me into this situation or you'll miss it completely."

- I believe, trust, and then depend on God to do what only he can do.

Do we ever fail to notice what God is doing or miss what he's saying to us?

Let me tell you the 1972 Folder story:

April 3, 1972 Jean and I were given a prophecy. We were only kids at the time, 29 years old (well one of us was 29 and the other 28). It was powerful, wide-ranging, and spanned years into the future. It was recorded, subsequently typed up, and we carried it with us from country to country and place to place for 34 years in a manila folder.

On May 21 of this year, one of our [4] pastors in Southern Oregon spoke a prophecy to Jean and me. Here are his exact words, "Go to the folder called 19.. – I don't know what this means – but go to the folder of your life called 1972 and pull out the word of the Lord from 1972 and walk in that."

I need to carve out some time in my life to slow down, to stop and think about what's going on – what I'm seeing and experiencing, what God has said, how it all fits together. I don't want to miss it! I need to:

- Make some daily time during my devotions to think about what's going on and how it relates to what God has said.
- Talk to others about what's going on so I get a broader perspective on things.
- Keep track of what God has said to me, about me, and check how it relates to what is happening now.
- Be willing to act on what emerges from the understanding I receive in this process.

So here it is in a nutshell:

- **I decide to believe.**
- **I feed my soul on God's word and look for the application points in my life.**
- **I follow Jesus into experiences and situations that give me new grounds for believing.**
- **I take time to relate what I am experiencing to what God has said in his word and what he has said to me personally.**
- **I get out of bed every morning and decide to keep believing.**

Cyrus read from Isaiah's prophecies and what happened? He found himself in the Bible. He found that part of what God said in his word was about him and to him. That's what you and I will find when we read God's word hungrily and thirstily. We'll find that part of it is written about us and to us!

Prayer:

Thanks Lord, for the Bible, your living word. It was living when you inspired the writers over a period of nearly two thousand years and it is living when I read it each morning, sitting in my recliner chair with a cup of coffee in my hand. I believe your word, I receive your word, and I commit to live by your word.