

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

- A. Introduction: Before Jesus returned to Heaven, He promised His followers that He would give us peace in the midst of life's troubles. This peace passes (or is above) our understanding. This peace helps keep us from being moved from faith and trust in God. John 16:33; John 14:27; I Cor 15:58; Phil 4:7
1. This peace comes to us through the Word of God. The Bible brings peace to our mind because it shows us what God is like and how He works in the lives of His people when they encounter tribulation.
 - a. For the past several weeks we've been looking at the fact that we can have peace of mind in the face of tribulation because God is with us—and nothing can come against us that is bigger than God.
 - b. The statement that nothing can come against us that is bigger than God is another way of saying that nothing is too hard for God and nothing is impossible for Him. The Bible makes these statements in a number of places and we have been examining several of them.
 1. Gen 18:14—When Abraham and Sarah were facing an impossible physical condition (unable to have children) the Lord told them: Nothing is too difficult for Me. You will have a child.
 2. Jer 32:27—When the prophet Jeremiah was facing an impossible, irreversible circumstance (the complete destruction of life as he knew it), Almighty God assured him: Nothing is too hard for Me. There is hope even in this hopeless situation. There is a future for you.
 - c. Recognizing the bigness of God inspires faith and confidence which brings us peace of mind in the hardships of life.
 2. Last week we looked at another place in the Bible where the statement that nothing is too hard for God is found—in the Book of Job.
 - a. Job experienced great calamity and loss in his life. He lost his wealth to thieves and a natural disaster. He lost his sons and daughters when the house they were dining in collapsed during a windstorm. And he lost his health to a severe skin disease. Job 1:13-19; Job 2:7
 1. Most of the book is a dialogue between Job and three friends as they tried to figure out why all this suffering came to him. The Book of Job doesn't address the *why* question beyond the general information that there is an adversary in this world who goes about as a roaring lion seeking people to devour. But it's not bigger than God.
 2. The Holy Spirit directs our attention, not to why troubles came to Job, but to how Job's story turned out. The Lord turned the captivity of Job and restored to him twice what he lost. James 5:11; Job 42:10
 - b. There's a lot in Job's story we didn't discuss. (For a more detailed study, read Chapter 6 in my book *God Is Good and Good Means Good*). Here's the point for our discussion.
 1. In the face of a great trial from which Job needed deliverance, God gave Job a revelation of His bigness. He spoke to Job from a whirlwind and talked about His might, His power (His bigness) as revealed through His creation. Job 38-41; Rom 1:20
 2. Job saw it, and it led him to declare that nothing is too hard, too impossible, or too big for God—not loss, not disease, not death. Job 42:2—I admit thou canst do anything, that nothing is too hard for thee (Moffatt).
 - A. Notice the second part of the verse: Thou canst do all things and no purpose of thine can be restrained (ASV); You can do all things and no thought or purpose of yours can be thwarted (Amp).
 - B. This second part of the verse is a major key to appreciating the bigness of God. It says that no plan or purpose of God can be thwarted. The original Hebrew in Job 42:2 carries the idea that no thought of God's can be hindered. We're going to discuss what that means in this lesson.
- B. Job's statement touches on the providence of God. We need some understanding of God's providence to

appreciate His bigness.

1. When we look at the word providence we can see the word provide. Provide is a verb that means to “supply what is needed for sustenance or support”. It can be used as an adjective (provident) meaning “having or showing foresight; providing carefully for the future”. Or it can be used as a noun (providence) meaning “the foreseeing care and guidance of God over the creatures of earth”.
 - a. You don’t necessarily need to know these words specifically, but you need to know the principle expressed through these words and let it shape your view of reality—your view of God and the way He works in this world.
 1. The idea that God cares for the creatures He has created is found in the Scripture. He is their provider and He provides for them. Ps 104:26- 27; Ps 136:25; Ps 147:9; Matt 6:26; etc.
 2. That’s one of the points God made to Job when the Lord revealed His bigness to Job: I take care of the creatures I have created. I am big and I am faithful. Job 38:41—(I provide) food for the ravens when their young cry out to God as they wander about in hunger (NLT).
 - b. God doesn’t deal only in short-term provision. He deals in long-term provision. He is provident. He has and demonstrates foresight in that He provides for, not just the present, but also for the future of His creation. Confidence in His short-term provision comes out of knowing God’s long-term provision or His providence.
2. Part of God’s providence comes out of His Omniscience or His All-knowingness. There is nothing that Almighty God does not know—past, present or future. He knows what is going to happen before it happens. This is called foreknowledge.
 - a. God sometimes put off short-term blessing (like ending troubles immediately) because He, in His foreknowledge, sees a way to cause it to serve His purposes and provide something better in the future.
 - b. In a previous lesson we talked about how God didn’t stop Joseph’s trial in the beginning—not because God was behind or approving of it in any way. Joseph’s afflictions were the result of freewill choices made by evil men motivated by Satan (Gen 37-50). This is an example of God’s providence.
 1. God, in His All-knowingness (or providence), saw where Joseph’s brother’s actions would lead when they sold him into slavery. Joseph ended up second in command in Egypt in charge of a food distribution program that saved multitudes from starvation during a time of great famine.
 - A. This included Joseph’s own family—the line through which Jesus came into this world, along with countless idol-worshipping heathens who heard about the True God, Jehovah, throughout Joseph’s ordeal. This is future provision, reaching down to today and beyond.
 - B. God was with Joseph throughout his ordeal, providing him with what he needed to survive and even flourish in the midst of it. God got him through until He got him out. This is present provision. Acts 7:9-10
 2. At the end of his ordeal, when Joseph was reunited with his brother, he was able to declare to them: You meant what you did to me for evil, but God worked it for good (Gen 50:20). This verse is the Rom 8:28 of the Old Testament.
 - A. God does not need evil in order to do good. But in a world that is filled with evil, the fact that God, in His providence, can cause it to serve His purposes is a tremendous promise.
 - B. Joseph told his brothers: God sent me ahead of you to preserve your lives (Gen 45:5-7). Joseph didn’t mean that God caused his troubles. Rather, he was expressing how in control God is over His universe and human choice. God didn’t cause any of it, but He used it all to provide for His people.
 - c. I’m not arguing for not being immediately delivered from troubling circumstances. I’m saying you can have peace of mind and don’t have to fear no matter what you’re facing. It’s not bigger than God. He’s not been taken by surprise. He sees a way to use it for good as He cares for us.
3. Remember, the Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed Himself and His plans

through the pages of Scripture. Job didn't have all the light we have about God's plans and purposes. We have the full light of Jesus Christ and the revelation of God given to us through Him (lessons for another day).

- a. But, through seeing the bigness of God, Job realized that God does and will take care of the creatures He created, and that He does and will deliver us from captivity—some in this life and some in the life to come. Job experienced both kinds of provision.
 1. Job 42:12-13 (Job 1:2-3)—The Lord turned the captivity of Job and restored to him double what he lost. Ten more children were added to the ones temporarily lost to him, but not forever lost because there is life after this life. God can reverse even irreversible circumstances
 2. Job 19:25-26—Job's health was restored to him. But like all of us in this fallen world, Job eventually died. But he knew that there was more to life than just this life. Even the stuff that isn't fixable in this life—such as death—isn't too big for God.
- b. Job saw a glimpse of the fact that nothing can stop God's ultimate purpose and plan to deliver His creatures from captivity to the wickedness and pain in this world.

C. We pointed out in the previous lesson that the Book of Job was intended to inspire the people to whom it was first written (Israel when they were trapped in Egyptian slavery) that nothing is too big for God. Nothing is too hard or too impossible for God. He delivers those who are suffering under afflictive bondage.

1. The Book of Job revealed that there is an Adversary (Satan) at work in this world who challenges God as he seeks to entice men into rebellion with him against God. That was actually Satan's motive in moving against Job. (Lessons for another day)
 - a. As the first rebel in the universe the devil is ultimately behind all the hell and heartache in this world. But through the light of the New Testament we know that the primary way he works on believers is through our minds—influencing our thoughts in an attempt to influence or behavior. Eph 6:11; II Cor 11:3; etc.
 - b. However, much of the trouble we encounter in life is the result of freewill actions taken by Satan-inspired men and women. One of the themes we see in Scripture is that this isn't bigger than God.
 1. Because of His foreknowledge (His Omniscience) God sees what is going to happen before it happens, and in His providence (His foreseeing care and guidance over the creatures of earth), He is able to devise a plan to put on top of the devil's plan and work it for good.
 2. The Lord is able to cause wicked plans to serve His ultimate purpose (more on that in a moment), caring and providing for His people as He gets us through until He gets us out. That's what Gen 50:20 and Rom 8:28 are all about.

2. The most spectacular example of God's providence (His foreseeing care and guidance over the creatures of earth) is the crucifixion of Jesus. It was a wicked act inspired by Satan and carried out by evil men.

- a. We don't think of the crucifixion as an evil event because we know the outcome (Gen 50:20 and Rom 8:28 in action). But the Bible is clear that Satan inspired Judas who then betrayed Jesus to the religious authorities. And these wicked men conspired to turn Him over to the Roman government to be executed. Luke 22:3-4; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:26

1. But God, in His All-knowingness knew what was going to happen before it happened. Jesus is referred to as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Rev 13:8
2. The Lord devised a plan to use this wicked action (the betrayal and killing of the innocent Son of God) to bring about the greatest good ever accomplished in the history of the world—the eternal salvation and deliverance of a race of sinful men and women.
- b. Remember, God doesn't need evil in order to do good. Rather, He is so big that He can take evil not of His doing and cause it to serve His purposes. That's how in control God is.
 1. Not "in control" in the sense that He causes or wills evil, but in the sense that evil cannot thwart His ultimate purpose of good for His people and His creation. God works it into His plan and

beats the devil at His own game.

2. The Apostle Peter was inspired by the Holy Spirit to state it thusly: Acts 2:23—This Jesus, when delivered up according to the definite and fixed purpose and settled plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and put out of the way, [killing Him] by the hands of lawless and wicked men. (Amp)
3. Knowing God’s providence, and understanding that nothing can thwart God’s plans and purposes, has very practical application for His people.
 - a. Shortly after Jesus returned to Heaven, Peter and John were put in jail by religious authorities for preaching the resurrection of Jesus to a crowd at the Temple. The crowd gathered because Peter healed a lame man by the power of God in the name of Jesus. Acts 3:1-26
 1. Acts 4:1-2; Acts 4:18-21—Temple authorities detained Peter and John and warned them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus anymore. The authorities wanted to punish Peter and John further but were afraid to do so because the crowd credited God with this healing miracle.
 2. Peter and John went back to their own company (other believers) and they all went to God in prayer. Notice that they started with the bigness of God. Acts 4:24
 - A. Acts 4:25-27—Then, they referenced Ps 2:1-2 where the psalmist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prophesied that the kings of earth would rise up against the Lord’s Anointed.
 - B. The psalmist reported that: Ps 2:4—He who dwells in heaven is laughing at their threats (Knox). The word “scorn” in the Hebrew has the idea of ridicule. The point is: How ridiculous to think that anything or anyone can stop God’s plan and purpose.
 3. This passage assured Peter, John, and the others that challenges to God’s plans and purposes don’t take Him by surprise, and no matter how big the challenge is—it’s not bigger than God.
 - b. The disciples realized how “in control” God is of His universe. They recognized that Herod, Pilate, the gentiles and Israelites gathered together, not outside of God’s foreknowledge and providence, but under His control—To carry out all that Your hand and Your will and purpose had predestined (predetermined) should occur. (Acts 4:28, Amp). Therefore, the disciples knew that they did not have to fear whatever came their way.
4. To fully appreciate God’s providence we must understand His ultimate purpose in His providential care of His creation. Unlike the other creatures of this world, human beings have a need that is greater than the necessary provisions of this life (food, clothing, shelter).
 - a. We are all guilty of sin before a holy God and deserving of eternal separation from Him. And there is nothing we can do about it. If this need is not remedied, it doesn’t matter how successful, prosperous, healthy, and happy we are in this life because we are lost to our created purpose—relationship with Almighty God in this life and the next. Matt 16:26; Luke 12:16-21
 1. We must understand that God’s primary purpose in the earth is not to make this life the highlight of our existence. Nor is it to end all of humanity’s sufferings. His purpose is to draw men to saving knowledge of Himself through Jesus so they can have life after this life. Because God is All-Powerful (Omnipotent) and All-Knowing (Omniscient) He can cause everything to serve His ultimate purpose. This is the ultimate providential care. Eph 1:11
His providence, has provided a way of escape from captivity to sin and its penalty. the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has met our greatest need by debt we owed for our sin. He has provided for our future, not just in this life, but in come.
 - b. God, in
 1. Through paying the the life to
 2. This greatest expression of His loving providence assures us that, if He has met our greatest need (salvation from sin), why would He not help us with lesser needs. Rom 8:32
- D. Conclusion: Consider one thought. Jacob was in the same story as Joseph. He looked at his circumstances and magnified the problem: Everything is against me (Gen 42:36). He robbed himself of the peace that would have come from magnifying God: None of this is bigger than God. He will cause this to serve His

purposes of maximum good and He will get us through us through until He gets us out (Gen 50:20).