

God's Providence

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Preacher: Tyler Neighbors

[0 : 00] So, Nick and I had talked about just kind of what we wanted to do.

We wanted to kind of co-teach a topic together, and that topic was theology proper. Has anyone ever heard that term before?! Theology proper?

Or anyone just wake up in the morning and get really excited about, yes, theology proper. I can't wait to learn about that. Well, in a nutshell, it's the doctrine of God.

There's all sorts of different avenues of systematic theology, and this particular facet of it is called the doctrine of God. And we studied the different elements of God's character.

Obviously, a month is not enough time to get all of that in. And Nick hit on the incommunicable attributes of God last week. The week before that, he hit on the Trinity. All these are describing different parts of God's character.

[1 : 04] Well, tonight we're going to be looking at God's providence. So, it's an interesting word. It's not something that you see in Scripture. You don't see the word providence show up in Scripture.

Much like Trinity, you don't see the word Trinity in Scripture. But providence is really just a word that describes how God interacts with His creation. So, while you don't see the word providence in Scripture, it's still a very scriptural term from the fact that it describes a truth about God.

Now, there's two words that kind of get mixed up a lot. Providence and sovereignty. These are two different things. They walk hand in hand with each other, but they are two different things. The sovereignty of God describes His ability to accomplish His righteous will.

So, if God wills for something to happen, there is nothing that's going to stop Him from doing that. In Isaiah 14, 27, it says, For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?

His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? So, sovereignty. God has the ability, and should He desire, nothing can stop Him. The next thing is providence.

[2 : 17] So, providence is the act of God providing the necessary means to accomplish His will. So, providence, John Piper defines it as this.

It is the act of purposefully providing. So, God playing an active role in His creation. So, God has a sovereign will, and to see to it that His will is accomplished, He is going to be an active player and provider for those He has called to accomplish His will.

There are some who are opposed to this doctrine. Some have a problem with a sovereign God that is going to actively intermingle with creation. A couple of these lines of thinking are, the first one is deism.

Deism often refers to God as kind of this watchmaker that just winds creation up, and then takes His hands off of it, and just watches it from afar. He's not concerned with creation.

That is kind of the, that's the gist of deism. I'm sure there's a lot more to it than that, but in a nutshell, that's how they see God.

[3 : 20] And the biggest issue with this belief is that it's completely contrary to everything that we see in Scripture. God is obviously involved in His creation. He's not distant. He's not silent.

He speaks. So, if you just read even a page of Scripture, you're going to see that God is active in His role in creation. The next line of false theology that we see is pantheism.

Now, pantheism basically states that God and creation are one. That God is not distinct from His creation. There's no division between God and His creation.

God is in the trees. God is in the wind. He's in the rocks. Again, if you spend any time reading Scripture, you are going to see that God is completely distinct from creation.

He's involved in it, but He is distinct from creation, and creation is distinct from Him. Alright, so you can't really get around that in Scripture. But this is why it's important that our understanding of God is founded in the Word of God.

[4 : 25] You know, in my experience, there's a lot of churches, whenever they hear the word doctrine or theology or systematic theology, they see that as strictly an academic pursuit.

Something that you learn in college, but it doesn't really apply to how we worship and how the church should function. Cannot be farther from the truth. In order to completely, well, not completely, but in order to understand God correctly, to worship Him properly, you have to have a proper understanding of who God is.

And you know that through God's Word. Anyone that says they've had a new revelation from God that's not founded in His Word, run far and run fast. But to understand God correctly, you have to understand Him from His Word.

And if you want to worship Him correctly, you need to understand Him properly and know Him properly. So, from the beginning, God has always been involved in creation. And desires for His creation to be in a relationship with Him.

And we're going to get to our main points here in a second. But just to kind of lay out a couple of examples for you of how He's been involved. You know, God was present and had communion with Adam and Eve in the garden.

[5 : 37] God was actively calling Cain to repentance before he committed the first murder. God showed His judgment on creation with a great flood. But He also showed His great mercy through the ark, through saving some that were righteous and that loved God.

When man wouldn't spread out over the earth like God had declared, He confused their language at Babel and forced them to spread out, to carry out His will to be fruitful and multiply.

God also called Abraham and set him apart for Himself and established a royal priesthood through His bloodline. So, the list can really go on and on. These are just a few examples of how God is actively involved in creation from Scripture.

But one of the things that we also see in Scripture too, is that we also see how God is working to fulfill His sovereign will for creation, which is to bring all things back to Himself.

You know, it's pretty easy to find in Scripture that, and even in today's world, that sin has drastically broken creation. And in God's Word, we also see how He intends to end things with bringing creation back to what it was supposed to be.

[6 : 54] So, where Adam and Eve may have brought death into the world, the Bible says that death is going to be the final enemy that is defeated at the feet of Jesus. When God confused the languages because of man's sinfulness, we see in places like Pentecost where we get a glimpse of what the kingdom of God is going to be like, where one day all tribes, all nations, all tongues are before the throne of God, praising Him and worshiping Him.

Where communion with God was lost and we were no longer allowed to be near the tree of life, God is going to bring us one day to a holy city where the tree of life is at its center, and God is with us and we are with Him.

So, that is God's sovereign will for creation, to bring things back to Himself, to restore things to the way that they used to be, and to finally and completely break the curse of sin.

So, while God's providence is a huge topic, there's so many things that we could talk about with this. I really just want to hit on three major aspects that I think really relate to us on a more personal level.

And the first one is this. God's providence and preservation, preserving His creation. Colossians 1.17 says, And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

[8 : 16] The next one is Hebrews 1.3. It says, He is upholding the universe by His word of power. Now, the word upholding or upholding is translated from the Greek word pharaoh.

Now, I am not a Greek scholar. I Google a lot of this stuff. So, I don't have all this stored up in my head. Google is my best friend. But what that literally means is to carry or to bear.

And when you see it in other places in the New Testament, it's the same meaning. When the friends were carrying their paralyzed friend to Jesus, same word.

So, there's this active role. It's an action word. So, God is active in preserving His creation. And again, this goes against all the foundational beliefs that we talked about earlier with deism and pantheism.

God is not absent from creation, nor is He one with creation. He is the uncreated creator who also acts as the great sustainer of His creation.

[9 : 20] So, even in our personal preservation, God has an active role in this. Psalm 104.23 When you hide your face, they are dismayed.

When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. So, God is providence over our very lives and existence. It's not an active will or ability on our part that keeps things going, but it's a gift from an eternally loving Father.

A God who can provide while never running out of provisions to give. For me, that's good news. I don't see why people have a problem with this doctrine of providence. I like the fact that a loving, sovereign God has taken an interest in my life.

So, Job 34.14-15 It says, If He should set His heart to it and gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together and man return to dust.

So, there's just a couple of implications as far as this first one of the, this idea that God is providential over preservation. First of all, this should lead us to a place of humility in our lives.

[10 : 39] You know, knowing that we are not preserved by our own limited means, knowing that God doesn't leave it up to our feeble efforts to maintain His creation and to maintain our very lives.

God holds that in the palm of His hand. That's humbling. That an eternal, sovereign God would take an interest in our lives and in the creation that He has left us in.

That's great news for me. This also points to the gift of God's common grace in creation. God's common grace extends to even those that reject Him.

In Matthew 5.45, Jesus said this, that for He makes His Sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

So, God's common grace, His grace isn't just extended just to those that are righteous and that follow Him. He has common grace and common provision even over those that don't know Him yet.

[11 : 39] God's providence, the next one, also extends to human affairs. We're going to look at a couple of fun things here. But God's involvement in human affairs is evident all throughout Scripture.

We can see His provision and sovereignty at work on every page. But one of the things I want to focus on is human authorities. This is kind of a hot-button issue in a lot of churches.

You know, a former church that I served in, the last election was particularly troubling for some people when they found out who got in office. It was an interesting time.

There were people that were upset, people that were angry. There were the few that were happy about it. And then there were some that were just waiting for black SUVs to come and kick down our doors and drag us all away.

It just got to the point where even in our choir practice, there was this lady that was particularly troubled with the issue. She was just crying and moaning and weeping in the middle of choir.

[12 : 41] So I finally just had to stop what we were doing. I was like, guys, it does not matter who is in office. This has not come as a surprise to God. We are still the church no matter what happens. Even if our windows and doors get boarded up, we are still the church.

We still have the same mission and I'm still being paid to lead a choir rehearsal so get it together. I didn't say that. I wanted to though. But as far as our human affairs go, authority is established by God.

There's nothing that has come as a surprise to Him. Romans 13.1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God.

So authority is instituted by God. People might think, well, what if the authority is unjust? What if the authority is not God-fearing and is making all these horrible decisions?

Well, I think when you look at the context that this verse was written in, that answers a question in and of itself. Paul was a Jew who was living in a Roman society under Roman rule and under the watchful eye of these authorities he had been flogged, stoned, chased out of cities, shipwrecked a couple of times, whipped.

[14 : 05] I mean, he had gone through it all. He was even executed at the hands of the Romans. But still he said, let every person be subject to governing authorities.

Now, speaking of rulers that don't really fear God, you know, God said himself in the Old Testament when he was preparing judgment for the children of Israel for their sins, that he had raised up the Chaldeans and the Assyrians to be his instrument of judgment against the Israelites.

So we can look on in confidence, you know, rather than trembling in fear, whenever we see these elected officials that don't fear God, this hasn't happened by surprise to God. God knew what was going to happen and God can still work things out for his glory. Proverbs 21.1. So I know that we're kind of flipping all over the page. That's one of the fun things about systematic theology. You don't focus just on one passage. It's systematic. It's all through God's word. So that's kind of the theme of systematic theology. [15:07] You never just hone in on one passage. You're tracing a theme that is consistent throughout all of God's word. But Proverbs 21.1 says, The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord.

He turns it wherever he will. So no heart is beyond the control of God. Even a king's heart. Even a king's heart that doesn't fear the Lord. When Israel was in captivity, I think I laid out some scriptures for you in there.

But when Judah was in captivity in Babylon, all throughout that captivity, you saw how God was directing things in Daniel's life.

How he was changing the heart of the king. How he was preparing things in advance with these rulers that Daniel was going to be serving under. God's sovereignty and providence doesn't know any boundaries.

There's nothing that's off limits to him. So no one is beyond the providence of God. So the next thing is that God is also providential over our personal matters.

[16:14] You know, a lot of times we think about God just being concerned with the big things. With God just, you know, being concerned in the world affairs like elected officials. But his omnipresence and his providence are not limited to the capital or world affairs.

It extends to our individual lives. God's interested in our individual lives and many times we see the small things just like that. That they're small things.

That, you know, we don't need to bring that to God. We can handle that on our own strength. We can, you know, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and white knuckle our way through any of the small issues. But that's not how God intended us to live.

He wants us to have complete faith in him because he is our provider. A good example of this from scripture, one of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is the story of Joseph.

You know, I don't think Joseph and his brothers ever imagined that their story would be read about thousands of years later. If I was one of the other brothers that wasn't Joseph, I know I wouldn't want that being read about thousands of years later after what I'd done to him.

[17:20] But, you know, I don't think that they saw this as any big deal. They probably saw this as a very personal issue within the family. They weren't a huge family yet. They didn't have global recognition or anything like that.

So they probably didn't see this as a big deal. But through scripture, we see that God can still work great things through personal issues, even through issues that were intended to be sinful.

You have the favored son from a favored wife among two wives and two concubines. If you watch, if you just read Joseph's story, it starts with dysfunction.

This was not a functional family. This wasn't something that you would say, this is what you need to aspire to in your homes. Jacob had two wives out of jealousy.

The wives threw their handmaids at him and said, you produce children through them. And through all this, Jacob played favorites with his wives. And even in that, he had a favorite son because his favorite wife bore one son, which was Joseph, and then later Benjamin.

[18:25] But anyway, Joseph being sold into slavery was just kind of the tip of the iceberg. I mean, this was not a functional family, but even then, God still used this situation.

Even though it was sinful from the beginning, God still used it to bring about his glory. You know, I wanted to show something that was, you know, kind of neat through the story of Joseph.

Joseph. You know, we see that Joseph had upstanding character. He was just diligently obedient to God in the midst of troubling circumstances. And people, a lot of times, they use that as the moral of the story.

But Joseph didn't have any powers in and of himself. He didn't have insight to interpret dreams apart from God's provision. Nor did he have anything special about him that should have elevated him to the highest place in Egypt.

God's providence was working all throughout this. Setting the king's heart and mind to call Joseph forward and to put him over the whole land of Egypt. But even more than that, through the story of Joseph, we can just see how God has worked all this out to show a typology of Christ in the Old Testament and allowing us to relish even more in the fact that Christ is the fulfillment of all things. [19 : 49] So just kind of replaying the story of Joseph and see if this sounds anything like Christ. You have the favored begotten son. He was sold and betrayed for silver by those that were closest to him.

He was falsely accused and imprisoned. And through obedience to God, God raised him to the highest place in the land to save his people from death. To me, that sounds like the story of Christ almost in the Old Testament.

So God's providence is ever-present and he's always at work even in the affairs of those that don't know any better. So a couple of implications for that in our lives. In our personal lives, we need to remember that God has a plan.

You know, even when things just seem like complete chaos, when you don't see how God is working all things out for our good and for his glory, he still has a plan.

He's still working. He's still providing. Anyone ever been in that situation, though, where you're just kind of stuck in the muck of everything that's going on in your life and you don't feel like God is working?

[20 : 52] I know I've been there. And I can tell you I didn't respond with the level of faith that some of these people in the Bible responded. But the truth in Scripture is that God is working all things out for our good.

So there's a lot of questions that come up whenever we talk about doctrines like sovereignty and providence. You know, if God is active in creation, then why does he allow sin?

I'm just listing some of these. I don't hold to any of these accusations. A high school student one time that was, you know, particularly new in his faith, he asked me, if God's all-knowing, wouldn't he have known that there's an evil snake slithering around in his garden?

I'm like, that's a good point. Yes, he did know that. Or if God is really providential over creation and is completely sovereign, are our sins really our choices?

Or are they directed by God? These are tough questions that people ask whenever they come to issues like God's sovereignty. And I wish we had time to address all these things and to talk about them in depth.

[22 : 00] That's a whole other rabbit trail for another time. But one thing that we need to see from Scripture is in James 1, verses 13-17.

It says, let no one say when he is tempted that I am being tempted by God. For God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it is conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

So do not be deceived my beloved brothers for every good gift and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

So one of the questions I think that we really need to ask from this is if God is so sovereign and providential why would he allow sin? I don't think that's the right question. I think the right question to be asking from Scripture is that despite everything that God has given us despite every blessing that he has provided and every reason he has given us to love him why would we still choose to sin?

[23 : 20] I think that's the real question that we need to be asking in this and I think we all know the answer we have a sinful nature that we struggle with so we need a path back we need a way to be made right which leads into the final and probably the most important aspect of God's providence where he is an active player that's God's providence in our salvation what he's done to provide for our salvation so going back to our original definition of providence which is God's provision to accomplish his sovereign will let's look at what his sovereign will is 2 Peter 3 verse 9 says the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness but is patient toward you not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance it also says that he doesn't desire the death of the wicked but he desires mercy in Ezekiel 33 11 say to them as I live declares the

Lord I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live turn back turn back from your evil ways for why will you die oh house of Israel so knowing God's will

that none should perish but that all should have eternal life let's see what he's done now in his providence to provide a way for us to receive that eternal life John 3 16 for God so loved the world that he gave his only son Romans 5 8 goes on to say but God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners that Christ died for us so regardless of what you believe about human free will I know that's a fun thing to debate in churches the truth of it is that we are naturally all children under wrath that is our natural state because of our sinful rebellion and we all like sheep have gone astray do I believe that God sovereignly chooses to save yeah I do

I think from scripture that God does sovereignly play a role in salvation but he still calls us to a life of obedience there's another long theological rabbit trail that you can get on as far as you know human free will over obedience over God's sovereignty that's a whole other sermon series for another time but regardless of whatever conclusion you've come to about the extent of free will and our choices I'm still forever grateful that God and his sovereignty chose to save that he chose to save us that he chose to provide a way for us to come back to him and be made right with him through Christ so God's sovereignty and providence it's it's not a doctrine to fear or to be dismayed over again I just see some people whenever we talk about these things in other churches they just kind of start shrinking up like but it's something that we should take great comfort in not only does God have a sovereign will for all of creation but he's constantly providing he's constantly providing all that we need to accomplish that will

God is not going to leave it up to our weakness to portray his glory either he's given us the righteousness of Christ God certainly didn't leave it up to our sinful nature to provide salvation thank goodness if it was up to my will if it was up to my abilities to receive salvation I'm just I would be done for so we serve a God who has saved us he's constantly providing to sustain us and he cares enough to be involved in the affairs of our lives for me God's providence it's an assurance of his love for us his deep care and abiding presence in our lives let's pray father thank you that from your word Lord we see that you are active in your creation Lord that you deeply care for us Lord that you provide for our needs that you are constantly working all things out for our good Lord that is one of the greatest truths that we can take from scripture that no matter what circumstance we might be in no matter what dismay we might find ourselves in

Lord we know that because we are yours Lord that you are working all things out for our good and Lord we can take comfort in that promise so Lord I pray that today that we would always recognize how you are working for our good Lord that we would always be thankful for how you have blessed us how you provided for us especially and most importantly how you provided salvation for us in your son Jesus Christ on a basis!

[28 : 50] Jesus name Amen Amen