

Evangelism and Providence John 1:35-48

Our sermon text this evening is John chapter 1, verses 35 to 48. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, we ask now that you would bless your word to us. Please help me as I preach. Please help us all as we listen. May we hear with living ears, may we receive the word with open hearts. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

John chapter 1, starting our reading at verse 35 down to verse 48. Speaking of John the Baptist:

“³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’ And they said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ ³⁹ He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’ So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).

“⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!’ ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, ‘How do you know me?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’” Amen. May God bless His word.

John the Baptist came to bear witness to Jesus Christ. He was not the light, we’re told, but he came to bear witness about the light, that all might believe *through* him. And we’re told that the light, the true light who is Jesus, came into the world, and yet the world did not know Him; and He came to His own people, being the Jews, and they did not receive Him. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.”

John the Baptist pronounced that Jesus was the Lamb of God. If you look back to verse 29 of chapter 1: “²⁹ The next day he,” that’s John the Baptist, “saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, “After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.” ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.’ ³² And John bore witness: ‘I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.’”

John was gathering quite a following. John was gathering a following that could be numbered in the thousands, according to, for example, Josephus, an historian of the time. John the Baptist was, at the beginning of his ministry, far more popular and gaining far more attention and adulation than Jesus. And if you're sent to be a preacher and a minister of the gospel, and an evangelist and a prophet, what you don't want is people worshipping you. What you do want is people worshipping the one of whom you are testifying.

I remember watching a documentary about advertising, about the development of advertising in our modern age, and one of the guys, the advertising exec, said one of the big mistakes you can make with an ad is to make the person in the ad so interesting that the people are more interested in the person than they are in the product the person is trying to offer. That's why you notice in ads, the people you see are in a way, attractive, but they're not quite spectacular. Most often in an ad, when someone has to talk about a product, they're pleasant, they're well-presented, but they're just not quite utterly spectacular, because the advertising execs want to advertise the product, not the person doing the talking.

Well John the Baptist wanted to turn people to Jesus. John the Baptist wasn't starting the First Church of John the Baptist. He was the first evangelist for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true living church, the New Covenant, or New Testament Church. He was the one pointing the way to Jesus. And one of the great ways, when someone who's a preacher or a teacher in testing out those who are following him, is to say something, to put a test before them: "Are you really listening to what I said?" And the story here sort of unfolds a bit that way.

The day before, John proclaimed of Jesus, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Here is the one upon whom the Spirit rests, and He's going to baptize in the Holy Spirit." Well now, he sees Jesus walking by, and his followers are there, those who've come to hear his teaching, and he says, "Behold, the Lamb of God."

What's the test for those who are listening to his teaching? The test is, Will they receive his word and act in obedience? Well, we see here that two of them did. One of them is not named, and it's mostly believed that the one who was not named was actually John the Apostle, the author of our gospel. In this gospel, John the Apostle never names himself. He always speaks of himself as sort of someone else—"there was one there," or, "the one whom the Lord loved." He never says, "John."

One of those who was unnamed followed him, along with another. Looking at verse 35, ³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!' ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus." So they've been listening to and receiving John's word as the word of God, and the word of God through John said to them, "Now, follow this one. Go with this one."

And I'm made a deliberate sort of play on words, because back at the start of John's gospel, we're told that Jesus is the Word who was with God, who was God, who took upon Himself flesh. So they've received John's speaking the word of God about the one who *is* the Word of God, telling them, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

“³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’” It seems pretty plain and ordinary, doesn’t it? What are you seeking? What do you want? What are you after? What are you hoping for? What are you expecting? “*What are you seeking?*” We’re not told particularly or specifically what they were seeking; we can only work out from Scripture and the teaching of the Bible itself what it must’ve been they were seeking. They were seeking reconciliation with God. They were seeking peace with God. They were seeking to know God Himself. They were seeking to know God through His Messiah, through His anointed one. That’s what they were seeking. And they didn’t answer directly. Let’s keep reading:

“And they said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’” Where are you staying? Where can we find you? Where will you be? Where can we get to you? Where can we come into your presence? “Rabbi, where do we find you?” Now once again, and I know we know better, but let’s just play through options—you might think that the Messiah, the Son of God, would be in a palace, or at the very least, a fortress, a town, a rich man’s house—somewhere flash, somewhere nice, with a court of nobles—you know, a lovely place. Well, it’s so plain and nondescript that we’re not even told where He’s staying. For all we know, it could have been a cave or a tent in the wilderness.

“³⁸ ‘Where are you staying?’ ³⁹ He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’ So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.” Now the tenth hour most likely means four o’clock in the afternoon. And if it’s the tenth hour in Jewish timekeeping, it’s ten hours from sunrise, and if the sun came up at 6:00 a.m., you’re getting roughly towards four o’clock in the afternoon.

“So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.” And the thought just occurred to me—they’ve had all of eternity now to think about how good those first few hours were. “Four o’clock in the afternoon, we entered into fellowship with Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.” They’ve had all of eternity to thank God for that moment. “We entered into fellowship with the Son of the living God!” I imagine they ate some kind of small meal there. It seems to imply that they stayed there overnight. They spent maybe hours—three, four, five, six hours.

I mean, imagine—they’re in heaven and, you know, they’re mixing with the people and chatting away. “You know what? We got to spend six hours, just us two—just us two, we got to spend six hours with the Lord Jesus. Six hours! We didn’t even know exactly who He was. All we knew was that the Baptist had told us that this was the Lamb of God—and we spent six hours, just we three having a chat, talking! We were soaking up His words. There was no one else there. What a blessed time. What a wonderful moment of fellowship.”

“So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.” Notice, as I said, one of the two. The other one’s unnamed. That’s why we expect that it’s John the Apostle. “⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).”

These are pretty ordinary happenings, in a way. I want you to look at how this evangelism is unfolding, because that's what's happening here. The call of God is going out, people are being called to follow Jesus, and they're coming. They're answering the call. Providentially, this is very ordinary stuff. A brother goes and finds his brother.

You know, when I was first converted, there was no one else in my family who was a Christian. I had two younger brothers, and my absolute and utter determination was that they were going to become Christians, and I was not accepting any alternatives. And I wasn't gentle about it. I was seven years older than the next brother down, ten years older than the younger—so that puts them around about 14 and 11, and I was the 21-year-old big brother. In their eyes, for some strange reason, I was a hero. They thought I was great. But I remember, I wasn't gentle about it at all. "I am now a Christian. I attend church. You are attending church. You will sit there, you will listen, you will stand when we stand, you will sing the songs. You will hear every word that's said." And they came. And in the providence of God, over the next coming months, they were converted. They were led to Jesus, just like I was. And we all got baptized together on the same day—a great day. It was a great day.

But it's so ordinary, my friends. It's so ordinary. It's people dealing with the people they know, people taking the good news to the people they love. Andrew went looking for Peter, or Simon I should say—he wasn't yet Peter. He went looking for his brother Simon. And what did he say to him? "We have found the Messiah."

What can we pick up from there? Well the first thing I'd say to you, my friends, is when you are speaking to people about Jesus—"We." "We." Andrew's already speaking corporately. He's already part of the church—"We." You know, a big mistake that we've come to make in the modern age as Christians, is we've started to think that our testimony is the gospel. Now, it's good to have a testimony, and if you've got a good testimony of conversion, Alleluia. It's good to have a testimony of your conversion. But that's not the gospel. The gospel is Jesus. The gospel *is* the Messiah.

When you go speaking to someone of Jesus, don't necessarily speak of yourself and your own heart. "We!" "We believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we from Scripture, and by the testimony of the Holy Spirit know that He died upon the cross at Calvary. On the third day, He was raised again, for our justification." Speak on behalf of the church. You're ambassadors, sent out by God from the church to put a message out in the world. Speak on behalf of the church. I mean, it makes not much difference if you're going here to our church, or the Baptist church, or the Assembly of God. Wherever you go, speak on behalf of the church universal—"We, the people of God, we who are Christ's people, know from Scripture and by the testimony of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for our sins, and that He rose again.

My advice to anyone with regards to evangelism is that you save your personal testimony to the last. Let that be the last thing you share. If you get to that point, if someone's listening, if they are willing to hear what you've got to say, and you can get to the point where you can actually share your own story, share it. But make sure you talk about Jesus, and talk about Jesus from the church—"We, the body of Christ."

Well, what did he speak about? “We have found the Messiah.” Now obviously, there he’s taking advantage of his relationship, as I did with my younger brothers. Brother spoke to brother. Simon has known Andrew all his life, and when Andrew came and said, “We have found the Messiah,” he’s all ears. “Where? Who? Show me.” And Andrew brought him to Jesus, and Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas, which means ‘Peter’.”

Have you ever thought of the significance of naming? Who picked the name of your children? They didn’t name themselves; you picked your own name. You picked the name you wanted your children to carry. Who named your pet? You named your own pet. And, you know, if you picked up a puppy and the people said, “We’re calling him Angus,” you say, “No, his name’s not Angus. His name is Charcoal,” or whatever. You call your puppy whatever you think your puppy should be called. Why? Because it’s your puppy. It’s your possession. It’s your thing.

Jesus looked at Peter and said, “Ah, yes, Simon. That’s a fine name. There’s nothing wrong with the name Simon. But you’re Peter. You’re Peter.” Now the funny thing is when it comes to assigning nicknames, we normally assign nicknames based on the past—on something that someone has done. You know, “Plugger”—he was a fighter. “Digger”—he was a plumber. “Blue”—he’s got red hair; sometimes we do it backwards. But we base a nickname on something that is evident, or something that has already happened.

Well Jesus based this name upon something that was coming in the future—on the transformation of Peter from a headstrong but faithful man, into a consistent and powerful disciple—an apostle, the head of the early church, the first preacher of the gospel on the day of Pentecost. He was going to be the rock. He was going to be the foundation stone, in a way. Jesus Himself is the foundation Stone, but Peter is going to be a rock. He’s going to be something reliable, something trustworthy. Jesus, speaking as the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, gives a nickname that points to the future.

We’ll keep reading. “⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’” Now we’ve got another kind of evangelism. This is Jesus Himself reaching for someone, not through a human agency. So we’ve got Andrew and John, who come to Jesus through the testimony of a preacher, John the Baptist. We’ve got Peter, who comes to Jesus through the testimony of his own brother, someone close, someone of the household.

Well now we’ve got Philip—Jesus just went looking for *him*. There was someone out there. Jesus, being empowered and led by the Holy Spirit, knew that there was someone out there that He had to get hold of and draw into the kingdom, and this guy was called Philip. And He said to Philip, “Follow me.” Follow me. It doesn’t sound that spectacular, does it? We think that to win a soul to Christ, you’ve got to have some kind of PhD, and you’ve got to be able to argue through philosophy, and you’ve got to be able to explain theology, and it’s good if you know Greek, and all of that kind of stuff.

Well, sometimes those things don’t hurt, and it’s good if you can convince people on an intellectual level. But the truth of the matter is, the word that hits the heart is the word that’s

empowered by God. And all of us have a true testimony. If we are Christians, we have things to say about Jesus that are true and are empowered by the Holy Spirit. When I say “testimony,” I’m not talking about how you were converted but about testifying as to what you know.

Testimony, if you don’t know it, is you speaking of your personal experiences. When you’re called into the courthouse to give testimony, you can’t speak of what someone else knows. If the court is trying to establish that something happened, I can’t go to court and say, “Well look, I know that that fellow stole that car, because Joel saw him walk out of his house at five in the morning, just five minutes before the car went missing.” That’s not testimony, that’s hearsay. That’s second-hand news and gossip. It won’t stand in any court.

Testimony is what you yourself saw, what you heard yourself. You experienced it yourself. Christian testimony is testimony of God’s dealings with us—what we know and have experienced ourselves. I often like to think of the Devil as some kind of lawyer. He’s an accuser; he’s an arguer. What do I mean by that? I think that when you try to give a word that’s not testimony, I think somehow he gets into a person’s ear and says, “I object. I object. This person is speaking of things they don’t know.” And your words just fall to the ground.

You’ve got to be able to testify that *you* have experiences in Christ. You have the Holy Spirit within your heart as the seal and the guarantee of your salvation, and He, the Holy Spirit, speaks to you from and by the Scripture. You should have a Christian testimony. You should be able to speak about God truthfully and in a way that is powerful. And it’s not an intellectual thing, my friends. What you’ve got to understand is that Jesus promised in Matthew chapter 28, “Go out into all the world, making disciples, and I will be with you always.” How is He with us? He’s with us by the Holy Spirit. Your words of truth are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Now that doesn’t mean that everyone who hears you speak is going to be saved. We know that’s not true. But it does mean that everyone who hears you speak, if you are speaking the truth from God, will actually know that it is the truth from God. We won’t go there, but the book of Romans in chapter 1 tells us that people are suppressing the truth. Everybody who hears the truth knows the truth, but they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

The Holy Spirit is with you. He’s speaking through you. He’s empowering your words. When you’re sharing the gospel, when you’re sharing the truth about God that you know, because it’s an experienced truth, it’s a part of your very life, it’s a part of your heart and soul—when you’re speaking the truth about God, the Holy Spirit is with you, testifying through you. So the person who refused to receive the gospel in that situation is refusing God. They’re not refusing you. They’re not rejecting you, they’re rejecting God and they’re rejecting the word of God. And they’re suppressing the truth, because the Spirit is there witnessing that this is the truth.

“Follow me.” Follow Jesus where? Follow Him everywhere. Follow Him wherever He takes you. Follow Him into Jerusalem. Follow Him when He’s being worshipped and glorified—“Glory to the coming King!” Follow Him when He goes to the cross. Follow Him when He’s being slapped and spat upon. Follow Him, follow Him, follow Him. That’s what He’s saying, “Follow me.” We’re called. It’s the universal call to every Christian—Follow Jesus. Follow

Him, through obedience, through the knowledge of the word of God. Be conformed into the image and the likeness of Jesus, and follow Him in obedience, fulfilling the Father's mission.

Let's keep reading, verse 44: "⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'"

It would appear that Nazareth was not known as a particularly nice place. It was not known as the kind of place from where you would expect to receive the Messiah. But Jesus was raised in Nazareth. Nathanael says, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Now don't be hard on poor old Nathanael. Why not? Because Jesus actually says something nice about Nathanael. Jesus likes honesty. Jesus actually likes honest. He likes people who are honest and who think.

You know, there's this picture out in the world. They imagine we're fools and idiots; that every time we come to church, we drop our brains in a box at the door and come in and fill our heads with fairy tales and rubbish. That's what the world thinks. They think we're fools and idiots. But that's not the kind of person that Nathanael was. Nathanael was basically, "I'll believe it when I see it. Okay, you tell me you've met a guy, he's from Nazareth, and you say he's the Messiah. Phh! I'll believe that when I see it." Here's the thing—Nathanael must have been being called by God, because when he saw it, he did believe.

Verse 47: "⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!'" Now that's an interesting little phrase, when you think about it. Who was the first Israelite? Who first got called "Israel"? Jacob. And what was Jacob's nature? What does his name "Jacob" actually mean? Deceiver. Deceiver, supplanter, the sneak. Remember Jacob the sneak, the wheeler and dealer. But I should say, in the providence of God, because we're told that Jacob was the one whom God loved. Jacob wheeled and dealt Esau out of his inheritance, and then he snuck into his father Isaac's tent, dressed up as Esau, and there he tricked his father into laying the blessings of the covenant inheritance upon himself. Jacob, the sneak. So here Jesus says, "Here's an Israelite indeed, in whom there is *no* deceit!" So it's actually an interesting little phrase, isn't it? No deceit. This one is of Israel, and in him there is no deceit. He's of Jacob, but he's no Jacob.

"⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'" Now what do we know about that? Not much, really. We know that it meant something to Nathanael. We'll read on there right now, but we're going to look at those last couple of verses next week. "⁹ Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'" It obviously meant something to Nathanael. We like to speculate, you know, "Nathanael was praying under the tree, and perhaps the last prayer he said was, 'God save me! Show me your Messiah. How long can we live like this?'" Who knows? That's speculation. You don't know that for sure.

But Jesus knew that Nathanael was under the fig tree, and Jesus knew that something was going on, and that was enough for Nathanael to realize that here he was talking to no ordinary person. He was talking to no average Joe. He was actually speaking to someone who had prophetic

insight, someone who understood things, someone who had understanding, someone who had vision, someone who could save—someone who could actually save him; someone who could actually make a difference in the world.

Now we've sort of walked our way through the text, and there's a few ideas I want us to confirm, or clarify. The points are: Providence. What's providence? Providence is the working of God through creation, and through all the normal things that happen. Providence is God working through everything that happens, everything happening and unfolding according to His will.

It was providence that I met a girl one day, on a street in Tweed Heads. It was providence that she gave me a Bible and challenged me to read the Bible. It was providence that she rang me up and said, "I'm taking you to church. I'm picking you up in ten minutes," then she dropped the phone. All of those things were the providence of God. It was providence that I had two younger brothers who hero-worshipped me, and who were prepared to hear what I had to say. It was providence that I dragged them into church, and said, "You're going to sit down and shut up and listen." It was providence that God planned that very thing to happen, because He wanted those two young boys to hear the word of God and to be converted. And it was providence that we got to be baptized on the same day.

God's providence runs all of creation—everything that happens. My friends, you don't live in Cooma by chance. You don't have the family you have by chance. You don't have the friends that you have by chance. You don't live the life you're living by chance. You're in the hand of God, and He is using you and everything around you. He's using your life and your words, and He's using the Christians around you. He has a plan. He has a purpose. He has a reason.

Often providence is hidden. Often you don't understand. Often things seem to go wrong. You've got no idea why things go wrong. There's been some pretty rough things happen in all of our lives, I'm sure. And at the time, it just seemed like the world was falling apart, and you wondered what God even had to do with it. Why? Why is this happening? And you were like Job. "Why is this happening? I was following you. I was doing as I should do, and yet everything seemed to fall apart." The knives seemed to land right in the middle of your back, everything seemed to be wrong, and yet God was using that—preparing you, building you up, strengthening you, teaching you to fight.

Who knows what purpose? I can't read providence. Only God can read providence. Only God knows what He's doing and why He's doing it. But I can look back at things that have happened in my life, and experiences Lesa and I have had in our lives—things that hurt and things that were good; blessings and troubles—and I can see how God has used them to bring us to this place, and this time, for this ministry, at this moment. It's the same in your life. It's the same in all of our lives.

I want to read to you from the Confession, paragraph 1 of Chapter 3. It says, "God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which

appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.”

Now what’s that saying? Let’s see if I can simplify it down a bit. “God by his most wise and holy counsel freely and unchangeably has decreed all things, whatsoever comes to pass.” What does that mean? Nothing has happened to you that was outside the will of God. Nothing has happened in your life that was outside the will of God. Nothing has happened in the world that was outside the will of God. Is that frightening? Yes, that’s frightening. That’s terrifying, because that means that God decreed war, and death, and bloodshed. And He’s not afraid nor ashamed to say that.

Turn to the book of Isaiah chapter 45. I’m not saying things to you, I’m not talking through my hat, I’m telling you what God tells us in His word. We’ll start reading from verse 5 of Isaiah chapter 45: “⁵I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶that 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. ⁷I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.”

“I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.” It’s frightening. My friends, we should be awestruck before God. We should tremble. You should always be fear-struck before God. It’s a holy and reverent fear. He is almighty and all-powerful, and He decrees all things that happen for His own will.

And you say, “Well, okay, why? To me that looks like a lot of bad stuff is happening, and it’s happening because God said bad stuff is going to happen.” He is revealing His glory. God’s glory is so good, God’s glory is so great, God’s glory is so special, God’s glory is so worthy of our praise, that anything that happens which reveals His glory is a good thing. Hard to swallow, but the truth. Anything that happens that reveals God’s glory is a good thing.

On the day of judgment, God is going to judge the evil and the wicked ones, and He’s going to cast them into the lake of fire, and that will be a revealing of His glory and His goodness. And all of us who are there, saved and worshipping, are going to be saying with every judgment passed, “Amen! Alleluia! The Lord our God, the omnipotent, reigns!” And He is good, and His judgment is good, and He is doing good, because He’s judging evil. And as far as God’s concerned, His glory is such a special thing, His glory is so worthy of our praise, it’s so important that we as His people know His glory, that to ordain or permit evil to happen so that His glory may be revealed more fully, is worth doing. It’s actually worth doing, and because God has said it’s worthy doing, it’s a good thing.

I’m not saying evil is good. Evil is not good. We are taught the law of God. God’s decrees are revealed to us. His righteousness is revealed to us. We are not to murder, we are not to lie, we are not to commit adultery, we are not to worship idols, etc., etc. We’re to love the Lord our God, and Him only. He has revealed His goodness to us. But He has, in order to reveal His glory, contrasted His goodness with evil. And because He has done that, I therefore know that that is a good thing, because God did it, and God is good.

In the end, my friends, you come down to faith. In the end comes the faith. You can be as studied and as wise as you want to be in terms of studying theology or philosophy, in seeking a deeper understanding, and I advise you to do so to the best of your ability. But in the end, the greatest of the theologians and the philosophers, if they are going to be worshippers of the living God, they come to that point of faith where they say, “God has done it, and God is good, and He has His own reasons, and His reasons are good. And that’s it. That’s all there is to it.”

So the Confession is saying that all things happen and are happening according to God’s will, but in such a way that God is not either the author of sin, nor does He have any fellowship with sin. Furthermore, it doesn’t take away contingency, freedom, or secondary causes. What does that mean? You are exercising your own free will, and so are the sinners in the world today.

Everybody is exercising their own will, according to their own nature, everybody—you, me, all the rest. People do take their own choices. It is a fact. And yet, each and every choice is ordained by God. Each and every choice was foreknown and ordained. Now some people have trouble with that, and they would prefer to use the term “permission.” God permitted. You can say God permitted, I don’t mind. In the end, you’re in the same place that I’m in. All right.

Think of it this way. You’ve got a baby crawling across a footpath towards a busy street, four-lane street. You’ve got the power to pick the baby up and stop him or her crawling into the traffic, and you’ve got the power not to. Now you can either say that God ordained this situation, or you can say that God permitted this situation, but He had the power to stop this situation. Whatever way you look at it, God bears responsibility for His own creation. Do you understand what I mean?

Whether you want to use the word of permission—God permitted this to happen; whether you want to use the word of decree, or ordained—God ordained that it would happen. In the end, as God has said in Isaiah chapter 45, “I make well being, and create calamity.” He takes responsibility for His own actions.

Now liberty—what does it mean where it says there in that Confession paragraph, “liberty”? It means people are taking choices according to their nature—freely choosing. When someone is brought into the kingdom of God, God, by the power of his Holy Spirit, grants a regenerate heart a new set of desires. Do you want to know what changes the instant someone comes to life in the sight of God? Desire. The desires are what change. No longer do people desire to be self-worshippers or autonomous, which means self-ruling. No longer do people desire to be self-worshippers or idolaters or autonomous; no longer do they desire to be moving away from God. God has granted them what the Bible calls a new heart.

Now when we hear a new heart, it’s not our little heart here that skips a beat. That’s not actually what the Scripture’s talking about. When it’s speaking about the heart, it’s speaking about the will, the center of our being, where we weigh choices, where we weigh things up, where we decide what we want and how we want to get there.

When God gives a new heart, He renews or regenerates our will so that our desires are now right, and the person who once had an evil desire and only evil desires, and desired not to know God,

and desired not to follow God, and not to worship and bend the knee, *now*, having a regenerate will, a new desire comes upon that person. They desire now to know God. They desire to be worshippers. They desire to have fellowship with the living God and His people. That's what changes—the desire, the will. Scripture calls it the heart. So everybody is freely following their own will, though God Himself has ordained all that happens.

Secondary causes. Well, secondary causes is basically what we would call science. Why is it hot today? It's the middle of summer, we've got thirteen and a half hours of sunlight, the weather systems at the moment are very stable, there's barely any breeze, we're in the middle of a high-pressure system—all these things are secondary causes. God has established the way that world runs. He has established nature that we can understand it, that we can rely upon it, that we can know what is happening. God has established secondary causes. I spoke to you earlier about my father-in-law, who is very close to the end of his life. You can say he's dying of kidney failure, cancer, secondary infection, etc., etc. And all these things are what God says are secondary causes.

Now we know the secondary causes, and we understand that. But I'm telling you what's actually happening in providential terms. In providential terms, God is calling my father-in-law home. He's a Christian man, and God is reaching out to that man to separate soul from body, and draw him into heaven, and the secondary cause by which He is accomplishing His purpose is the illness that at this point in time is taking him to the grave. God uses secondary causes.

All things happen according to the will of God. Now we've already looked at some Scripture about that. Turn also if you would to Psalm 33. Let's just look at one more. Here I want to look at verses 11 to 15. Psalm 33, starting at verse 11:

“¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! ¹³ The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; ¹⁴ from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, ¹⁵ he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.”

What did that just say? “He who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.” Now what did I just tell us about the heart in Scripture? It's not necessarily speaking of this thing that's beating in the middle of your chest. It's speaking of your will. “He who fashions the *will*, He who fashions the desires of them all and observes all their deeds.” God is the one who created mankind.

Adam and Eve in the Garden did not have a corrupted will. They could have obeyed. They were in a situation where they were innocent, where they were created in the image of God, with the righteousness of God, and they had the power to obey the command. They also had the power to disobey the command. They were in a situation where they could break God's law, and they chose to—freely, of their own desires, according to the ordained will of God. They broke the law. They took of the fruit.

And it says that God “fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.” He looks upon them all. He rightly calls wickedness, wickedness. He rightly calls good, good. He rightly judges all of humanity. God does these things. It is His right to do such things, that His glory may be revealed. Why were we created in His image? That His image would be glorious and give Him the glory. That’s what we’re here for—to glorify God. He is the sovereign God. He has power over all things.

So Providence—what we’re seeing happen here in the gospel of John is God’s providence unfolding, people being called into the kingdom by the power of God through the testimony of His people; people being called, just by providence—just by such ordinary things, yet God planned everything.

Turn to John chapter 15. Now it appears to us that this calling of the apostles is just a chance happening, that it’s not planned, but look at what Jesus says in John chapter 15, verse 16: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.” You did not choose me, but I chose you. Jesus, the perfect God-man, the perfect man living in obedience to His Father, lives in obedience to God’s revealed providence. The people whom God drew into His circle are the people whom He chose. “I chose you.” Nothing’s happening by chance here. It’s the concept of effective calling—God calling those whom He wishes to save.

Now we send out a general call to all the world, because I’ve got no idea who God’s going to save, nor do you. It’s not carried as a brand on the forehead or upon the back. The invitation goes to everybody—“Come! Come and receive Christ. Come! Come into the kingdom. Come and receive forgiveness. Put your faith in Christ. Repent of your sin. Beg the forgiveness of God. He’s willing to forgive all who come to Him in repentance.” That’s the truth. But it’s God who empowers the word into the lives of those whom He calls. It’s God who makes your word effective.

You know, think about it this way. If you want a burden on your life, if you want a burden that will weigh you down to the grave, you take the burden of thinking that it’s up to you to convert somebody. You think that it’s up to you to call somebody into the kingdom. “If only I can argue strongly enough, if only I can explain clearly enough, if only I can love a person deeply enough.”

Put all the responsibility onto yourself, and see how the failure will grind you into the ground. Because if it’s all up to you and if it’s all up to me, and if it’s all up to our obedience—well, my friends, why are we such failures? Why is it that we can’t win anybody with our arguments and our talking and our love?

And I confess, my love is not deep enough, and my love is not strong enough, and I confess that I’m not good enough. All right, you want a burden that’ll weigh you down to the ground and burn you out? Take upon yourself the burden of providence that you’re going to save somebody for God. It just won’t work. But my friends, here’s the thing, and here’s God promise: He will use our preaching of His word to accomplish His ends. He will use our preaching of his word to call His people. It relies on Him, not us. I just simply have to live in obedience to His will. I simply have to live in obedience and trust God.

And you say, “Well, if that’s the case, why would you pray?” Well my friend, there’s no point asking someone to do something who doesn’t have the ability to do it. You’ve actually got to ask somebody to do something who has the power to accomplish your purposes. If you’re in a court case here in Australia, do you know what the Australian Constitution says? It says that sovereignty resides within the Federation. What does that mean? It means that the Queen has no sovereignty over this nation. She is a figurehead sovereign. She can’t get involved in our courts. Our Constitution actually forbids her from getting involved in our courts. If you’ve got a legal case, there’s no point bombarding Her Majesty with letters asking her for help. She has no sovereignty. She can’t help you.

God is sovereign. God has power. When you pray for the salvation of souls you love, have you ever prayed liked this: Lord, I love Bill, and I want him to become a Christian. And Lord, I pray, that he gets opportunity after opportunity after opportunity after opportunity to change his mind and become a Christian. And I pray that he hears the most convincing speakers that there are to be heard, and I pray that he reads the very best arguments for these, and that there are to be read, and I pray.....” No. You don’t pray that way. You’re praying to a sovereign God.

So, what do you ask? “Save him! Save him!” The very way that we pray demonstrates that we understand that God has the power. Nobody prays, “God, preserve his free will. God, preserve his choice. I understand, O Lord, that you can’t get involved and that he has to make his own choice, and so...” None of us ever prays that way. We pray, “God, save him! God, intervene! God, exercise your sovereign power and change that heart! God, take hold of that person and make him your own! Father, please, do it!” That’s the way we pray. We pray to a sovereign God. I have never heard anybody pray to a God who’s a God of chances, of, you know, accidental meetings and all the rest of it. He’s a sovereign God.

Jesus said of the disciples, “I chose you.” This meeting with Andrew and John and Philip and Nathanael—Jesus was choosing them. “I chose you. I drew you into the kingdom,” or I should say, the Father drew them to Jesus. John chapter 6, verse 44: No one can come to the Son unless they’re drawn by the Father. And the promise is that to anyone who comes to the Son, no one will be cast off. They only come because they’ve been drawn by the Father.

So we’ve looked at the idea of providence and the idea of calling. There’s one last thing I want to look at from our passage tonight. That is the insight that Jesus exercised in verse 47: “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, ‘How do you know me?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’” Now this is just a theological hair that I’d like to split, but it’s important.

True understanding is the basis of true faith. I want us to understand something here, because I know the tendency is to say, “Well, you see, Jesus was the Son of God and He had omniscience.” It’s true. Jesus in His divine nature is truly God. Omniscience is part of the divine nature of being truly God. But my friends, what we have to have is a substitute. God saved on a legal basis. He saved, fulfilling His own law. The reason that the sacrifices of lambs and oxen and goats could not truly save is because they could not truly be our substitute, because they are not people. They are not human. A substitute has to be truly a man. He has to be truly human.

So what I want you to see and understand is, when John the Baptist spoke of Jesus, he said that He was a man. Turn back to verse 30 of chapter 1 of the gospel of John. “³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’” A man. Now there’s something special about this man. He has a divine nature. He has a human nature.

But look at verse 32. What we need to understand about this man is that John bore witness. “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.” The man Christ Jesus lived as a faithful man, in the power of the Holy Spirit. He lived as a faithful man, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus uses the phrase, “If I cast out demons by the finger of God.” Now that, if you trace it back through the Old Testament, is the work of the Holy Spirit. “I’m casting out demons through the power of the Holy Spirit.” Jesus was truly a faithful man, living and ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We can’t have a hybrid Jesus. You’ve got to have a true substitute. You’ve got to have a true deliverer. You’ve got to have a true man being a true king of humanity. You see, Jesus is the second Adam. Adam was a man. The first man fell, and put all of his progeny into sin. We need a man who’s going to lead his progeny out of sin—a man, a true man, ministering in and by the power of the Holy Spirit. He didn’t know these things because in His divine nature He’s God and omniscient; He knew these things, He preformed the miracles that He performed, in and by the power of the Holy Spirit. He’s God, the Son of God, truly human, truly divine.

As I said, I know that it’s a hair to split, I understand that. Turn to First Timothy chapter 2. We’ll just look at verse 5: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus. Have your theology right, and you’re standing on a firm foundation. You’ve got to understand these things to the very best of your ability.

I understand it’s a hair-splitting idea, and what if someone thinks the wrong thing—well, they think the wrong thing. But the problem is that today’s unimportant error, give it a generation or two, becomes tomorrow’s major heresy. And these battles have been fought out in church history, where there have been break-away sects from the church who had wrong, or false Christology. Now what’s Christology? It’s the teaching about Jesus. False Christology is wrong doctrine about the person of Jesus.

For example, the Gnostics taught that Jesus was not truly a man and He had no true flesh. The teaching of Gnosticism was that the physical is evil. So the idea that the Son of God could have flesh, true skin, true bone, true blood, would be the idea that the Son of God could be joined to evil. So the Gnostics taught that Jesus was never truly a man, never had truly a man’s body, never had truly a man’s nature. He had divine nature, and He was just deceiving everybody into thinking He was a man. And that was the hidden wisdom. Gnosticism means “knowledge,” and the idea behind Gnosticism is “hidden wisdom”—wisdom that the average Joe doesn’t get. It’s sort of tied in with the occult.

There were those who taught that Jesus was some kind of Superman, that He could never suffer as a man, that He only pretended to suffer as a man. That heresy I'm thinking of there is Apollinarism—a technical word that doesn't mean a lot.

The point is that all of these divergences from the truth, give it a generation or two, become heresies, become breakaways, become things that trouble and harm the church, become falsities that bring people into blindness and darkness.

So I'm always going to split that hair and tell you, you must understand that Jesus was truly and perfectly man, truly and perfectly God, and that as our covenant head, as our King, He had to be a perfect man, because we need a substitute who is a man. He has to be human. The first human king was Adam, and it was a human who dragged everyone into sin. We need another human king—He's called the last Adam in First Corinthians chapter 15—who drags His people into righteousness. And He has to be a man to do that. And that's the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour. So, we'll leave it there tonight and close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you for your word. We thank you and praise you that you have made yourself known, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the Scripture. Father, we pray that you would help us to love you and to know you as we should. Help us to get our minds around the truth, and to found our lives and our faith upon the truth. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.