

The Providence of God - Job 1

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on February 25, 2007

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Today I want to look at what used to be the most famous and well-known of God's attributes in America; Providence. Nowadays, it's unfortunately probably one of the least mentioned attributes, and some in this room don't know what it means.

It's been well said 'the historic importance of the doctrine of providence is only overshadowed by its contemporary neglect. In 1963 [one writer] described providence as "the forgotten stepchild" of contemporary theology ... [It has] been generally ignored and in some cases repudiated.'" (E. Frank Tupper, *Review & Expositor*, Vol. 82, p. 579)

Today we're going to look at the book of Job again, this time at the beginning, but before we see God's providence in Job's life, I want to go back into our nation's past a little to get some historical perspective of when people spoke often of God's providence and urge us to bring this word and concept back into our everyday speech and thinking.

Roger Williams was the founder of the first Baptist church in America [early 1600s, the *real* "First" Baptist]. He didn't seem to have a chance. The law was against him, and the church was against him, and the political leaders were against him. It was the most spectacular trial in American history to that point, when he was taken to court because of his fight for religious liberty. He was found guilty and sentenced to banishment. Americans were not yet ready for such radical liberty, and they wanted this man out of the country. Fourteen men were hired to surprise him in the night, and drag him to a ship where he would be carried into exile. Governor Winthrop, who was his secret friend sent him a warning. He kissed his wife and new born baby, and fled into a blinding snow storm. For weeks he survived without bread or any weapon. He ate roots and nuts, and was finally rescued by friendly Indians.

It was only by the providence of God that his life was spared, and that is why when he established a permanent home he called it Providence, Rhode Island. He founded the first Baptist church of America there in 1639. His marble statue stands in the Hall of Fame in the Capital building in Washington D.C. More biographies of Roger Williams have been written than of any other American next to Benjamin Franklin. What he did laid a foundation for religious liberty for the rest of our history. (above is taken from www.faithmania.com)

When George Washington was a young officer in the Virginia Militia, reportedly in one battle this 23 year old officer had two horses shot out from under him, and 4 musket balls passed through his coat. He wrote to his brother after the battle, "Death was leveling my companions on every side of me, but by the all-powerful disposition of providence, I have been protected." (*Ibid.*)

This is the way people spoke. A couple thanksgivings ago, our extended family was sitting and reading some excerpts from the original pilgrims and original thanksgiving and Jaime's mom remarked about how they used the word providence and how we don't hear that word much anymore. But, the word providence was constantly on the lips of our spiritual forefathers.

- There were excellent Puritan works, such as *The Mystery of Providence* by John Flavel, or *All Things for Good* by Thomas Watson.
- You see the word “providence” used in speeches by U.S. presidents into the last century.
- Even up until Civil War times, the word providence appears all over letters written by everyday soldiers back to their families. It was very much a part of common language of Americans in recent generations.
- I find it interesting that providence was so much apart of the vocabulary of God, that it was not just an attribute of God, it was capitalized and used as a *proper name* for God.

This doctrine has really meant a lot to me this past year, and I have experienced the truth of it in God’s directing us to this church here, orchestrating events, knitting our hearts together with the people, how His hand has been so evidently at work here, there is no question that the unity in this pastoral transition of the last few months is the Lord’s providential doing, all of the little details and timing and the preparation of our hearts, from the little things to the big things, God’s providence has been a strength in uncertain times last year seeking the Lord’s will and it has been the pillow upon which I can rest my head at night when difficulties come in the future.

I want to be a part of a movement that brings this word back into our use, because it’s a wonderful word that’s theologically rich and practically essential, and I think Job 1 is a great chapter that illustrates the truth of God’s providence.

We saw last week that the climax of the book of Job is the supremacy of God, that God is God and we are not. To be clear, God comes to Job in the end as a friend not an enemy, speaking the truth in love to bring Job back to the place of humble trust that can experience the great care and love God has for His own. In order for us to respect Job properly, notice that according to Job 1:3, Job was the greatest man on earth, he was a blameless man according to verse 1, and God Himself tells Satan in v. 8 that there is no one on earth as righteous as Job. In Ezekiel 14:20, God appeals to Noah, Daniel, and Job as the best examples of righteous character and intercession in Israel’s memory. If Job needed to be reminded of God’s supremacy than surely we needed that reminder as well.

The story of Job also teaches us that we do not have all the answers, and God in Job’s case didn’t want him to have all the answers. God didn’t want Job to reason with him, He wanted Job to rest in Him. God wants us to trust Him with a childlike faith that may not know what’s ahead, but that holds tight to the hand of a Loving Father. Even if we did have all our *why* questions answered, it would not satisfy us as much as the *who* question – who God is, that He is sovereign and good. That’s what Job needed and what we need.

Another theme in the book of Job is the suffering of the righteous. Many throughout history have asked about the pain of the innocent, and how that fits with God’s sovereignty and character. The book did not answer all of Job’s questions, nor do I expect this brief message will answer all of your questions about the problem of evil, but it does remind us of important principles about God that we can bank on in any trial. And in Job 1 we will see four of these principles that will help us in whatever God’s providence has for us in the future.

God Gives (v. 1-5)

- Seven sons and three daughters were given to him in v. 2, signifying completeness. Children are from the Lord, Psalm 127 declares.
- Verse 3 also indicates the blessing of God in Job's possessions, which we also know are from God, as v. 10 and Deuteronomy 8 makes clear. Everything we have is due to God's providence, to His provision, His common grace.
- Notice in verse 4 that they had a close-knit family, also a blessing from God.
- In verse 5 we have the example of Job praying for his children, sacrificing for them, being the priest of his home in interceding for them, concerned even about sins that may just be in their hearts – what a picture of a father!

God gives. This is a good starting point in looking at God's providence. We acknowledge this every time we pray "give us this day our daily bread" – we work for it, but we recognize that ultimately God gives it.

This is the truth of James 1:17 that every good and perfect gift is from above, from our heavenly Father

The root of the English word "providence" is of course "provide"

One of the key truths we saw in Job 38-41 last week is that God provides for all his animals and creatures, gives them strength, gives them food, takes care of them from the time from the smallest newborn baby animals to the greatest and biggest dinosaurs. God governs and ordains the time of birth of a mountain goat, or when the deer are calving, God is the one who lets the wild donkey go free, the one who makes some birds have great intelligence and others like ostriches not so much smarts. God is the one who feeds the ravens, who causes a horse's mane to grow and makes them jump and gives them their strength. This is all due to the Providence of our God.

Abraham probably lived in same era as Job and in Genesis 22 we have a memorable story of the Lord's provision.

⁷ Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. ⁹ Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." ¹³ Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. ¹⁴ Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided."

It is no coincidence that the ram got caught in the thicket that very moment, that the angel of the LORD is not dispatched too late, that God providentially spares Abraham's son a moment before death, and providentially gave a lamb as a substitute offering. This beautiful picture prefigures the way the Heavenly Father gave up His own son as the Lamb of God to die on another mount called Calvary and take away the sins of the world for all who would repent and trust Christ.

This may be an extraordinary example of providence, but God is equally involved in the ordinary events of everyday life. There are no coincidences, everything has a purpose. And whenever God gives, we should praise Him right then.

God Governs All (v. 6-12)

READ TEXT

The question Satan raises deserves our attention: Do we serve God because He is God or because it profits us?

Three aspects of God's Governing Providence are seen in this section

1) In verses 6-9 we see God *presiding*

- angelic beings are under Him, even fallen angels
- Satan is alive and well, but he is not in charge
- Even Satan is subservient to God
- Jesus told Peter "Satan has asked permission to sift you as wheat" (Lk 22:31)

2) In verse 10 we see God's *protection* and blessing

3) In verse 11-12 we see God *permitting*, or "purposefully allowing"

- Satan cannot lift a finger apart from God's will
- Notice in v. 11 Satan calls on God's hand to strike Job (was it Satan or God's hand doing this? In some senses both – more on this later, primary vs. secondary causes)

Ephesians 1:11 says believers are "predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will"

The Heidelberg Catechism was published in 1563 in German, and endorsed by the Synod of Dort which is best known for their theological rebuttal of Arminius and the five points of Arminian theology.

Question # 27. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. God's providence is His almighty and ever present power,[1] whereby, as with His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures,[2] and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty,[3] indeed, all things, come not by chance[4] but by His fatherly hand.[5]

[1] Jer. 23:23, 24; Acts 17:24-28. [2] Heb. 1:3. [3] Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15-17; John 9:3; Prov. 22:2. [4] Prov. 16:33. [5] Matt. 10:29.

All things whether big or small are under God's providential governing

- God sustains the massive universe and everything in it (Heb 1:3, Col. 1:17, Isa 40)
- God is also in charge of the forming of the internal organs of unborn babies according to Psalm 139:13
- God governs all things in-between

God Takes (v. 13-19)

Read text

Job hears the news from each of these messengers in perhaps less than a minute or two. His entire world and life unravels with unparalleled devastation.

Job goes down in history as one of the most blameless and godly men who ever lived, who responded as well to trials as humanly possible, especially in this chapter as we will see. One of the lessons we learn from the bad examples of Job's friends is that we must not presume that people's suffering is always a result of their personal sin, as Job's friends wrongly insisted (cf. Abel, Uriah, and man born blind in John 9 who Jews presumed blindness was because either he or parents sinned).

But we also cannot assume we are blameless – usually we suffer because of sin and there are always lessons God has for us to learn or sins we need to repent of that become evident when we're under trial.

Why do I say God *takes*? Why not say “The Lord gave and the Sabeans / Chaldeans have taken away?” Or “God gave me wealth, and Satan took it away?” Why not just “God allowed” or as some Christians say “God did not have anything to do with that.”

The reason I say “God takes” is because that's exactly what Job says in verse 21. And lest the reader think Job sinned with his statement here, the very next verse anticipates our objection and makes clear by God's inspiration that what Job said was right. READ TEXT

God controls the supernatural and natural, temptations and tragedies

Notice verse 16 speaks of “fire of God fell from heaven”

Verse 19 speaks of a great wind that came in such a way that all of his children died instantly when the house collapsed.

We read last week in where God declares that He is the one who governs floods and the sea, He commands storms as well as sunsets, controls the rotation of the earth, sets precise limits for the ocean and its waves, he holds back or sends snow and hail, he guides thunder and lightning and sends rain and ice.

Insurance companies have better theology than some Christians when they speak of “acts of God” for lightning, thunder, hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes (Northridge illustration)

Psalm 89:9 affirms that God rules the raging of the sea and controls the waves and can still them, as best illustrated by Jesus in the boat during a storm. Psalm 104 and 147 illustrate providence

Not only weather and natural disasters, but Job also says “the Lord takes” about acts of terrorism, stealing and murder of his family. Again, verse 22 makes it very clear that Job did not sin in saying this – nor was he blaming God. It's possible to attribute God as the ultimate cause and sovereign of all things, and not indict or blame him for the sin itself.

READ JOB 2:7-10

In v. 9 his wife tells him to curse God (what Satan said Job would do). Job could have responded the way one pastor I heard on the radio did in saying “God didn’t have anything to do with tragedy or disasters, etc.” That’s not what Job said.

*Notice that Job says both good and adversity is from God. Don’t miss that: Job is saying to his wife we should accept adversity **from God!** Adversity from God?! That must be a typo, right?

And again, every reader wants to shout out “No, Job, you don’t understand – the good stuff was from God, yes, but the adversity is from Satan, Job don’t say stuff like that, you’re sinning with your lips in attributing adversity as coming from God.” And by God’s inspiration, the very next phrase in v. 10 immediately says “*In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*”

The N.T. confirms this in James 5:11 where it praises Job for his endurance and it says his suffering was “*the Lord’s dealings with Job*”

TURN TO JOB 42. Notice in verse 10 the Lord gives again in restoring Job. But notice in verse 11 again the language of the Lord taking, it speaks of “all the evil that the Lord had brought on him.” There were secondary causes to be sure, but God is the ultimate cause, because He is absolutely sovereign.

This is a little beyond our comfort zone, stretches our mind, moves us into a deeper end of the pool. But we need to take the whole counsel of God seriously and not settle for superficial theology like Job’s friends did.

Careful theologians of the past made a distinction between primary and second causes

“God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass, yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” (Westminster Confession, III.1)

R.C. Sproul asks: “Who was it that afflicted Job? Was it God? Satan? [Natural disaster? The Sabeans?] The Chaldeans? It was all of them together in a grand scheme of concurrence ... In reality Satan did not coerce the Chaldeans to steal Job’s livestock. It was not as if the Chaldeans were pristine, pure, moral virgins who were suddenly forced against their wills to steal from Job. They were cattle rustlers from the beginning. God had put a hedge around Job, protecting him from the assaults of men and to unleash his assault against Job. He made us of the wicked desires of the Chaldeans, who had undoubtedly coveted Job’s livestock all along. God’s purpose in Job’s trial was to vindicate Job against the slander of Satan and to demonstrate His own power and glory. Satan’s purpose was to mock God and prove that when left to themselves men will serve Satan rather than God. The Chaldeans had their own agenda. They weren’t interested in the cosmic drama that left Job vulnerable to them in the first place. They were interested in the cattle and their own commercial profit. We have here multiple players with various motives, all working together to accomplish the will of God. This coworking, or synergism, is an example of the mystery of concurrence.” (*The Unseen Hand*, 88)

God is God (v. 20-22) – He can always be trusted and praised

Job does not curse God as Satan said he would, one of the most amazing words in all the Bible is found at the end of verse 20: “worshipped” (!)

Ray Stedman summarizes his response in v. 21 this way:

"Thank God for the times when I did have these things, and the enjoyment they gave me; the times with my children, and the blessings they brought into my life. Rather than complain about the loss, I recognize God's sovereign right to do with me as he will. If he gives me things, he has the right to take them away. All I can do is say 'Thank you' for having had them as long as I did."

“It is truly remarkable that Job followed adversity with adoration, woe with worship. Unlike so many people, he did not give in to bitterness; he refused to blame God for wrongdoing” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:720).

“Many a church member has cursed God to His face and left the church for good over much less than Job suffered. There is also a good lesson in stewardship here. Job knew that he was merely a steward of his possessions, not their owner; even his children really belonged to God. If they belong to God, the true owner, He has every right to take them when He pleases. Job knew he would have to give it all back to God when he died, and only one further step was required to acknowledge God’s right to take it all back earlier.” (*KJV Bible Commentary*, p. 933)

As C. S. Lewis once remarked when asked the question, "Why should the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" he replied; "they're the only ones that can handle it."

The N.T. says we do not grieve like the rest of the world who have no hope.

Habakkuk 3:17-18: ¹⁷ *Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,* ¹⁸ *Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*

Can you say this truthfully?

Going back to the Heidelberg Catechism, Question # 28 asks:

What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by His providence?

A. We can be patient in adversity,[1] thankful in prosperity,[2] and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love;[3] for all creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move.[4]

[1] *Job. 1:21, 22; Ps. 39:10; James 1:3.* [2] *Deut. 8:10; I Thess. 5:18.* [3] *Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:38, 39.* [4] *Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28.*

Horatio Spafford ... had known peaceful and happy days as a successful attorney in Chicago. He was the father of four daughters, an active member of the Presbyterian Church, and a loyal friend and supporter of D. L. Moody and other evangelical leaders of his day. Then, a series of calamities began, starting with the great Chicago fire of 1871 which wiped out the family's extensive real estate investments. When Mr. Moody and his music associate, Ira Sankey, left for Great Britain for an evangelistic campaign, Spafford decided to lift the spirits of his family by taking them on a vacation to Europe. He also planned to assist in the Moody-Sankey meetings there.

In November, 1873, Spafford was detained by urgent business, but he sent his wife and four daughters as scheduled on the *S.S. Ville du Harve*, planning to join them soon. Halfway across the Atlantic, the ship was struck by an English vessel and sank in 12 minutes. All four of the Spafford daughters—Tanetta, Maggie, Annie and Bessie—were among the 226 who drowned. Mrs. Spafford was among the few who were miraculously saved.

Horatio Spafford stood hour after hour on the deck of the ship carrying him to rejoin his sorrowing wife in Cardiff, Wales. When the ship passed the approximate place where his precious daughters had drowned, Spafford received sustaining comfort from God that enabled him to write, "When sorrows like sea billows roll ... It is well with my soul." What a picture of our hope! (*Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, 202)

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