

God Over All

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Last time last Sunday we were together, we had a Communion service and we focused on the atonement, how Christ is the only way, the only truth, the only life, and those who put their faith in him for salvation are secure because God keeps them forever, nothing can snatch them out of his hand as we saw from Romans 8 and John 6 and John 10 and Philippians 1:6 which we didn't allude to last time says that, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it," will complete it, "until the day of Christ Jesus." So we have this great running start of recognizing that God for us who are believers in Christ, God has done something miraculous and magnificent in our lives, he has caused us to be born again, as 1 Peter 1 says, he has brought us into his kingdom, brought us into his family as an act of love, he saved us from under the dominion of death and the devil and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son as Colossians 1 tells us and reminds us.

So we have already, already we have seen the sun rising as it were, on the magnificence of what God has done in our lives as believers in Christ, and for those of you that are not in Christ, I invite you to Christ that these things might be true of you as well. The Christ who died for sinners and rose again for their justification is the same Christ who through his word offers to you this exact same salvation. I have nothing about my salvation that is not immediately available to any sinner who would repent and put his faith in Christ. That's how wonderful and universal the Gospel is.

God has done this work in our lives, we been born again, now we are delivered into Christ's kingdom and that leaves us with a logical, what I think is a perfectly logical question, a perfectly important question: now what? Now what? What shall we make of life now that we have been born again, now that we are in Christ? And simply stated, this is a simple non-technical summary of what we are about to look at over the next week and a half or so, simply stated and you really need to get this, you really need to get this, but God who saved you now leads you. The God who saved you keeps you in his hand and that is not simply a future statement that he will deliver you into heaven at the end, and in between leave you to your own devices. No, the God who saved you now leads you. He will lead you in the future during the course of your life and not only that, my friends, not only that, my beloved fellow Christians, from the moment of your birth looking back to your birth even up to the moment of your conversion we can say this on absolute biblical authority, that even through your entire non-converted life God was leading you in the past. He was leading you in the past even when you were living a life of sin and rebellion. God's hand was directing you to the point where you would come to

faith in Christ and enter into his kingdom. I'm going to show you biblical support for all of this, I'm just orienting your thinking for now. The God who saved you is leading you at this moment, he will lead you through until death, and you can look back to birth, you can look back to the parents that God gave you and recognize that God arranged that for you, he ordered that specifically for you and for your good in mind, and he led you all the way through your unconverted life and he's leading you all the way. Why can we say that? How do we know that that is absolutely true? That's an important question to know and to understand and I'll explain in a moment, but what I want you to see is this, this is all by way of introduction, since all those things that I've said are true, then that has an implication for your Christian life. It means this, it means that you can have peace without fear of the future because your future is in the hand of the God saved you, your future is in the hands of the ones that were given on the cross for your sin, and if that's true, then that means that you can look to the future without any sense of fear of what might happen to you. Period. End of sentence. End of paragraph. It also means this, beloved, and some of you really need to hear this, some of you really need to hear this aspect of it in particular: it means that you can live life now without looking into the past, without that settled sense of regret over the ways that you have failed or sinned in the past, it means that you can look back to the past without that consuming sense of bitterness over the way that people have wronged you in the past. Period. End of sentence. End of paragraph. End of chapter. What we're going to see here is the doctrinally key to living life without fear, without regret, without bitterness, recognizing that there is great comfort and security in the recognition that the God who saved you in the past, saved you at some point in your personal past when he caused you to be born again and gave you new life, the God who did that, the God who has heaven reserved for you as we see in the letters of Peter, the God who has done those bookend things in your life in time is guiding every moment, every aspect, every detail of everything in between, and if your life is in the hands of the nail-scarred one who loved you and gave himself up for you, beloved, then how could it be anything but good for you in the end? It can't be any other way. There is great comfort and great security in that.

And I just want to say one other, maybe two other things by way of introduction. Part of the reasons that this doctrine that we're going to look at is so crucial and so important is that it is the answer to – I say this gently – the erratic and fear-filled lives that many Christians live, and we just need to be really candid and blunt and honest with each other. We are Christians and we live in the realm of God's grace and yet somehow our lives are marked by erratic decisions, hasty, abrupt decisions to change a course in life just because we're uncomfortable with our present circumstances or we have this fear of what's going to happen to us in the future, what's going to happen to my loved ones, what's going to happen in my job, what's going to happen in my education, what's going to happen in our politics, and all of this consuming fear dealing with the matters of the world that just cause us to be less than the shining light for Christ that we were called and appointed to be.

So what we're about to see is the answer of stability for lives that are erratic, that are filled with fear. This is the answer of peace to the worried and troubled heart and so profound is the effect of what we're talking about here today, beloved, I want you to

know that I can remember the exact place when it clicked for me in a way that is with me to this day. It doesn't mean that I don't stumble along the way, that's not the case, but these things are settled in a way that I don't go back and rehearse my prior decisions with a sense of regret or what if anymore. All of what we're about to see lets you put all of that away, put away all of that unprofitable thinking that you can't change anyway, and start to live productively in the present and going forward in a way that is constructive rather than always asking, "What if? I should have done more. I should have done less. Why didn't I say this?" All of those questions get put to rest by this very thing that we are about to study. So I want to help you with the things that have helped me, I want to help you with those things that are certain in God's word and we're going to consider now the doctrine of divine providence is no abstract theological truth of minor consequence, the doctrine of divine providence, I would say, is if not the most important doctrine to understand for a profitable Christian life, it is certainly in the top two or three, not that you should rate or compare doctrines with one another this way. But this is key. This is central to everything else. It will deepen your reverence for God, it will steady you in your trials, it will give you confidence in the future, and it will give you the ability to leave a troubled past in the past and not have your troubled sin-filled past or the way that people have sinned against you continue to work against you in the present because of the mind and effort that you give to rehearse those things in your mind.

The doctrine of divine providence with all of that introduction, teaches us this: that God continually upholds his entire creation and he sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes. God continually upholds his entire creation, visible and invisible, you could say, he continually upholds his entire creation and sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes. Now that's a mouthful. That's a lot to say and to grab hold of, but today what we want to do in this particular message is I want lay a foundation for everything that we have to say about this most crucial doctrine and it takes time to do this, and this is where I say that you need to give God your effort to understand and to patiently work through the Scriptures in what we're about to see because thinking about it in terms of Proverbs 2, it talks about how the one who desires God's word has to dig like gold for it, and those who are in the mining industry and who mine for diamonds and mine for gold, they go to great lengths, they move the earth literally to get to those precious nuggets that have such earthly value to them. Well, I want to tell you if you don't recognize it now, take it on faith by what I'm telling you, that this doctrine of divine providence is like finding a 500 carat diamond that is of infinite worth in your spiritual life, but it's not laying out there on the surface so that you can just casually pick it up. These are things that God reserves for those who give their effort and make the effort to study and to think and to meditate on it to find it and to grasp it, and those who are casual and flippant about the Christian life should not be surprised that these deeper things escape them because Scripture tells us to be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth, and that's not just true for the teachers of God's word, it's true for people like you to take the effort, to take the time to say, "God, what does Your word say about this?"; to put aside your phone, to turn off the TV, to turn off

whatever other silly things that occupy your mind so much throughout the week, and to focus on these matters of profound truth that God has revealed in his word.

We can think about it this way. I've described it this way in the past. We can all to one degree or another understand gardening, whether you like to do it or not. You have a piece of ground that you want to garden, you want to have fruit and vegetables for the future but you've got this untilled piece of ground in front of you and so what do you have to do? You've got to work it, right? You've got to pick up rocks and move them. You've got to till the ground. You have to dig. You have to plant and you have to weed after that, and it takes months for the harvest of it all to come, and it takes hard work to do that. You don't just wake up one day and find really nice tomatoes and cucumbers just laying on the ground for you to enjoy if you are a gardener, you understand that there is work and preparation that goes into it. Studying divine providence is like that, it takes some heavy lifting and some hard work at the start but, beloved, it's worth it. It's worth it, I promise you that it's worth it.

So what we're going to do today is we're going to just kind of consider this under the title "God Over All," and look at it in three distinct ways here. First we're going to see that God's providence is broad, God's providence is detailed, and that God's providence is personal. God's providence is broad; second point, it is detailed; thirdly, it is personal, and that's what we want to see here.

The doctrine of providence asserts this, it says that God once he created the world continually sustains it and orders all of its operations. In other words, we reject the deistic idea that God created the world and then just left it to run on its own. No, God created the world and now he actively works in the midst of his world and in every aspect of his creation from the smallest, tiniest, little detail to the broadest possible things that you could ever begin to consider. So God orders having created the universe, having created the world, he now orders the world according to his eternal purpose so that everything that happens in his creation will result in the predetermined end that he established before the beginning of time. In other words, God is completely sovereign and God is sovereign over all in a way that means that he is at work in absolutely everything that happens. So let's look at this, first of all, that God's providence is broad. It is pervasive. We could say it this way which might be a better way to say it, God's providence is comprehensive. It is comprehensive. It is exhaustive. It covers it all. It covers everything in the universe.

Look at Ephesians 1:9 as we open the text now. Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 9. It says in Ephesians 1:9, after talking about the redemptive work of Christ, this is exactly the sequence that we're following, isn't it? Last week we looked at the redemptive work of Christ as we celebrated Communion and we remembered his death on our behalf. In verse 7 it says,

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us.

In regeneration, in salvation, God lavished his grace on us and that is all rooted in the redemptive work of Christ at the cross. Now where does Paul go from that? It says at the end of verse 8,

In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Now look, I understand that you can read those verses in 30 seconds but you must stop, you must think about what is being said and how comprehensive it is. The Apostle Paul says here that all things are summed up in Christ, things in heaven, things on the earth. That's pretty comprehensive. He says at the end of verse 11 that God predestined us "according to His purpose," and he is the God "who works all things after the counsel of His will." Now beloved, when the Scripture says "all things" it means all things. It doesn't mean all things and then there's a category of important exceptions that you can't put under that umbrella. No, this is the idea that God is working everything that happens in creation to accomplish his purposes. Everything. That's the key word. Everything. That's the key word.

Now when it says in the New American Standard "the summing up of all things in Christ," to sum up it has this idea, it's a word that would be used to describe the summary at the end of a speech or the summary at the end of a legal trial where an attorney sums up his entire case for the judge or the jury and says, "Here's where these pieces of evidence fall into place, and because these things all fit together like that, you should render a verdict in favor of my client." The attorney looks at the entire case, sums it all up and presents the verdict that is to be rendered as a result of the evidence that was rendered at trial. Well, expand that by infinity and realize that it's describing what God does with everything that happens in creation, that God has the ability and has the intention to gather up everything and to summarize up everything that ever happens in the course of human history, everything that happens in the heavens and on earth, everything that happens in the invisible realm of angels and demons, everything that happens in the visible realm of man, all of that and whatever else we might have excluded by the way that we phrase those things, all of that is under this broad statement of Scripture that says and teaches this, that God moves everything in the universe to his predetermined end to glorify Jesus Christ. God works all things so that nothing thwarts his plan. Now the Apostle Paul is not specific here, he simply states this in God's control in the broadest way possible. He states it comprehensively. He states it exhaustively to say that God's providence, God's rule over his creation is absolute and it is very very infinitely broad so that it covers everything and everything is summed up in the work and purpose and ultimate goal of God. Everything, without exception.

Now there are several other passages of Scripture that affirm this unqualified sense of God's control over all of his creation. You can just jot this text down, we won't turn there now for the sake of time, but in Psalm 103:19 it says,

19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

His sovereignty rules over all.

You should be in the book of Ephesians right now, turn to the right a couple of books to the book of Colossians and look at Colossians 1 in verse 15, speaking of Christ it says that,

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation

Meaning he is the preeminent one in the universe. Christ is the preeminent one. It's not a statement of time, it's a statement of position. Verse 16,

16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Do you see it, beloved? Do you see this absolute assertion of absolute sovereignty over everything in the universe? All things in the heavens and on earth, in other words, beloved, you could look around, just to illustrate this, you could look around this room, you could look at each other, you could look down at your feet, you could look up at the lights and everything that you see with your physical eyes, that you hear with your ears, everything in the realm of your physical senses, all of it is under the controlling guiding hand of Jesus Christ. That is what the Scriptures say, all things have been created through him and for him. Verse 17,

17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Do you see it again and again? Verse 16, all things. It says it at the end of verse 16, all things. Verse 17, all things. Verse 17, all things.

Now look, beloved, at this point there is a crucial aspect of your response to the text on something like that and your response needs to be under the authority of the word of God, your response needs to be, "I may not understand all of that but I'm not going to make up exceptions in my mind to what God's word says." The text says, God's word says all things created by him, sustained by him, guided to the end of his glory. All of them. That means, beloved, that we don't carve out exceptions in our mind that in effect are denying and disbelieving what God has said in his word. However else we work out the emotional personal implications of these things, it starts here, it starts right here with recognizing what Scripture says and saying, "I accept this. I submit to it even if I don't fully grasp all the implications of it," because none of us do, "but I accept this and I submit to it. God,

teach me more. God, I see that You're saying all things, teach me more. Lead me through Your word that I might grasp the majesty of what I am seeing here." Your heart response is critical to it all.

Look at Hebrews 1 for just one more statement of the breadth of the sovereign rule, the sovereign providence of God. Hebrews 1, again speaking of Christ, and in that even we see that providence is a Christ-centered doctrine, and as we remember Christ, we remember his death and resurrection on our behalf and all of these things are tied together, as we'll see here in Hebrews 1:3 where it says,

3 ... He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature,

In other with, Christ in his essence as deity is exactly like the essence of God the Father, they are exactly the same in essence, and look at what it says about Christ, he

upholds all things by the word of His power.

All things again stated there clearly and without exception. Then it goes on to say,

When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Christ, in essence, is God. Christ in his work made purification for our sins. Christ now has sat down at the right hand of God because his work of redemption is finished. That's what he said on the cross, "It is finished. Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit. There's nothing left for Me to do. I've drunk the cup all the way down. It's done, I commit Myself to You." And he breathed his last as Scripture tells us. Now that Christ, beloved, I realize that it might be a bit loud for the hour of the morning, I just have to tell you and I have to use something about my voice to emphasize the cruciality of this, that Christ is the one who has all things in his hand. He is the one who upholds all things by the word of his power. You see, what Scripture is doing is it is elevating Christ in our mind and in our eyes and in our hearts before our very understanding, elevating Christ, the one who is God, the one who made redemption on our behalf, that Christ further is the one who upholds all things by the word of his power. Wow. It takes your breath away, at least it takes mine away.

So what this means for us, beloved, and all that we're trying to establish here is the biblical groundwork for this simple statement that I'm about to make, is that God's providence, God's providence is as broad as you can possibly imagine, indeed God's providence goes beyond all that you could imagine, all that you could think. Because God's providence is infinite, because it covers everything that ever happens during the course of time and that it has eternal purposes in mind, the doctrine of providence and what the implications of providence go exceedingly far beyond all that you could ask or think because it covers all things.

So an infinite God exercises an infinite providence over an infinite number of things over everything in the universe. Let that sink in for a bit and to realize that what Scripture teaches us about God is this infinitely high view of him. He is high, he is lofty and the work that he does is broad and comprehensive and exhaustive so that we can say simple statements like this: why do the stars orbit in space? It's because Christ orders that and sustains it. Why do your arms stay attached to the trunk of your body? It's because Christ is upholding all things in the universe by the word of his power. If he withdrew his word, everything would disintegrate. Why does your chair hold you up as you sit on it? It's not simply a matter of the construction engineering of the way that it was made, your chair holds you up because God sustains the chair that's holding you up. God's holding it all together. Everything is gathered together under the power and the supervising control of this great God, of this great Christ. It's absolute. There are no exceptions.

Now it's one thing to say that, it's one thing to say that God controls everything, that he sustains everything in the universe, it's one thing to say that and that's completely absolutely true but, and this is I think, this little transition that we're making here, this transition here is probably what helped me the most personally, it's one thing to say that God controls everything, it's another thing to do this, it's another thing to do what we are about to do right now, it's another thing to list out biblically one by one, one after another, all the matters that Scriptures say is under the hand of God, that is governed and determined by his purposes. So you can say God's sovereign over all and most of you would give a hearty amen, but in your heart you haven't had the opportunity maybe yet to think it all the way through. Well, Scripture helps us think it all the way through. Our second point here is that God's providence is detailed. It's detailed. God's providence is broad but it's also detailed and what I want to do is take you through a few representative topics and a few representative texts, these certainly aren't all that could be said. God's providence is detailed, first of all it's detailed in this sense in that God is providentially in control of nature. God's providence is over nature. God rules over the created world.

Look at Psalm 147 with me. Psalm 147, and as you're turning there, I just, you know, just encourage us all to have this prayerful spirit as we consider these texts, that the Spirit of God would illuminate our minds to help us understand the implications of what we're reading, and not only for ourselves but for those that are around us and listening to this as well, that there would be a spirit in our hearts as we read these things of saying, "God, do an illuminating work of Your Spirit that seals these things to our heart and make the lights go off in our minds so that we could grasp it and give You the honor that You deserve, and have the benefit in our faith that these things provide." God rules over the created world. Look at Psalm 147:7.

7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; Sing praises to our God on the lyre, 8 Who covers the heavens with clouds, Who provides rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains. 9 He gives to the beast its food, And to the young ravens which cry.

Look at that. We see the weather reports and we just associate what happens in the weather with the forecasters who are giving it to us. No, Scripture tells us to think more

deeply about it, that God is so in control of his creation that he is ordering nature to accomplish his purpose. Nature runs its course under the guiding hand of God, not from some independent power of mother nature or abstract biological or climatological processes. God is at work in everything that happens, even in nature. So the regular cycles of nature and astronomy are the means that God uses to operate his universe. That's what it says.

Look at it again, he provides rain for the earth, he makes grass to grow, he feeds the beasts. Look down at verse 16,

16 He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. 17 He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold? 18 He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.

Beloved, you look at just that one passage in Scripture, we could multiply them but we won't for the sake of time, you look at that one passage and you see that Scripture tells us that the God of the Bible is the God who is over every aspect of the nature of his creation. His providence is detailed.

Now we can take it a step further in this realm of nature, he is Lord over the animal kingdom. Over the animal kingdom. Over nature, over the animal kingdom. We see God's care for the animals.

Look at Psalm 104, and as you're turning there, just to think for a moment, you say, "Well, is that even important? You know, does it even matter what happens to a flock of birds in Omaha, Nebraska today? Why does that even matter? Why are we even talking like that?" Well, you start to see that things that you and I don't even care about, we don't even think about, are things that God is directing, controlling, providing for, ordering his creation in complete utter detail.

Psalm 104:24,

24 O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions. 25 There is the sea, great and broad, In which are swarms without number, Animals both small and great. 26 There the ships move along, And Leviathan, which You have formed to sport in it.

Look at this, beloved, verse 27, "They all wait for You," it's personal,

27 They all wait for You To give them their food in due season. 28 You give to them, they gather it up; You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good. 29 You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire And return to their dust.

God providentially ordering the birth, life, provision and death of all the animals in the earth. In other words we could say this, animals live, eat and die in the providence of God, and that providence, that supervising providence that we defined earlier in the message. Now look, beloved, Jesus himself said these very things. He made this very point. In Matthew 6:26 he said, "God feeds the birds of the air." In Matthew 10:29, he said not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from him. And so in a magnificent act of condescension and care even for the dumb brute animals, God feeds them, God cares for them, he provides for them, he supervises and orders even their existence.

This providence is over nature and its over the animal kingdom. We can go further on this. Thirdly here as we see the detailed nature of God's providence, God is over the animal kingdom, he's over nature, he's over even seemingly – I use air quotes here – chance events. He's over seemingly chance events. The classic text on this is Proverbs 16:33 which says,

33 The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.

The lot in those days would be the equivalent in our day of like flipping a coin, rolling a pair of dice, Scripture telling us that the outcome of that is ordered by God, that he works in a way that determines the decision of what comes up in those seemingly random chance events which means that people lose billions of dollars in gambling each year under the providence of God because God is directing the outcome of the game, even of the games of so-called chance.

The Puritan Matthew Henry says this, listen to this quote carefully, please. Matthew Henry says this and remember, we're looking at how detailed providence is. The details of it here are where this comes to power with our minds. You know, there's a saying, I'm going to get to the Matthew Henry quote in just a moment, there is a saying that most of you will be familiar with that says that the devil is in the details, meaning that in plans where things can go wrong is often in the details. You can have a great idea but if you're not careful about the details, the plans can fail and that's where things can go wrong. Well, what we're saying here today is the flip of that and what we're saying is that God is in the details. God is in all of the details and Matthew Henry says this and I quote, "The divine providence orders and directs those things which to us are perfectly casual and fortuitous. Nothing comes to pass by chance nor is an event determined by a blind fortune but everything by the will and counsel of God. What man has neither eye nor hand in, God is intimately concerned in." And so the fact that you and I don't think details are important, certain details in the universe are important, we should not ascribe our indifference and ignorance to God as he rules the universe. God determines and it pleases God to rule over every aspect of his creation and he is not limited by our indifference to the great majesty and comprehensive nature of his rule. God rules in the details and so the fact that people might mock this and say, "Oh, so God is ruling over a tree leaf?" Reduce it to something simple that makes it sound foolish, we don't go there. In humble submission to Christ and in humble submission to his word, we say, "Yes, God cares about every detail of His creation."

Think about it this way. Some of you ladies, God bless you, you are very concerned about every particular detail of the way that your house is structured. You look after every detail in every room of your house. Good for you. That's a good way to be. I like that. Some of you men, you can focus with laser detail about every aspect of your financial situation and you budget carefully and you watch where every dollar goes. Good for you. That's a great way to be. And in your little realm, you watch over the details. Well, multiply your finite being by infinity, multiply your care over the things that are under your realm by infinity and recognize that the way that you are in your tiny little realms in your little life, is the way that God looks at everything under the realm of his entire creation and it pleases him to order and watch over every detail of everything that he created and set into motion, and to make sure that it is all directed to accomplish his end at the end.

So, no, we don't trivialize this as we look at the details. The details help display the glory of it all. Beloved, it means that God has a purpose in everything that happens. Nothing happens apart from his knowledge and his superintending direction. Let me say that again. God has a purpose, is working out a purpose in everything that happens. Nothing happens apart from his knowledge and his superintending direction. But we can go from the micro view, the toss of a dice, we can go from the micro view to the macro view and say, fourthly, under this detailed nature of God's providence, that God rules over the nations. God rules over the nations.

In the book of Daniel 2, beginning in verse 20 it says,

20 ... Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. 21 It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings

Beloved, beloved, we've said that God feeds animals, he feeds the birds, the sparrow doesn't fall apart from him, and we look at it under the microscope and then we pull out a telescope, we pull out something greater than the Hubble telescope, we pull out the word of God and we look at it through a telescope and we see that God is ruling over the rise and fall of world rulers. Alexander the Great rose up in the providence of God, the directing, sovereign, supervising hand of God. The Shah of Iran rose up under the guiding power and direction, hand of God, and he ruled just to the exact limits that God had appointed for him to rule. Donald Trump became President under the providential guiding hand of God. And in the same way some of you need to hear, Nancy Pelosi became Speaker of the House under the providential sovereign hand of God. It pleased God to give that authority to those men and women. We turn all of that out and we step back and we meditate on the word of God and say that these people have their positions of power because it pleased God to give it to them. We may not understand all of the reasons for it, and we don't, but we see that apart from all of the chatter of political heads, God is at work in the rise and fall of world leaders. At a world level, at a national level, at a state level, at a local level, God is sovereignly accomplishing his purposes. That is what the book of Daniel said. He establishes kings and he takes them away.

So beloved, we've seen the broad nature of God's providence in passages like Ephesians 1, we've seen it in detail in nature, in the animal kingdom, in seemingly chance events, and ruling over nations. You can think about God's providence on a continuum, if you will, on a broad broad continuum, one end and the other end. On the one end, beloved, of God's providence, there are details that he sovereignly rules in that are of no concern or even of any interest to you whatsoever. What happens to birds, who cares? God's providence is ruling over that realm. On the other end of the spectrum, you have the affairs of international events, international leaders, the rise and fall of world wars over the course of history, and on that end of the spectrum you have no control over it even though quite often it affects you personally. Some of you may have family that went overseas and died overseas fighting world wars in your past and you had no control over it but the government came and drafted your loved ones or your ancestors into service and they had to go out and they had to serve and put their life on the line. You had no control over it even though it intimately affected you. Things you don't care about, things that matter and you have no control over, Scripture says God is over it all and not only over it all, he is over it all at every point in between. The details, the tiny details, the macro details that historians will be writing about if Christ carries 500 years from now, God's over it all which brings us to our third point. In the midst of this, as breathtaking and as impossible as it is to get our minds around the continuum that I just described, there is another aspect of this, this adds another dimension to it that just shatters our minds and our abilities to understand and comprehend even further and it's thirdly is this, it's that God's providence is personal. God's providence is personal. Beloved, this is where we kind of come to a point of thinking this through in the way that it implies our lives. This is where it really feeds an understanding of personal faith and personal trust because with everything that we've said, it's obvious that if God is over all like we've been talking about then it means this: God has personally guided every detail of your life.

Turn to Psalm 139 with me. As you're turning to Psalm 139, I realize that there are unanswered questions in the things that I've said here. Those questions, many of them will be answered on Tuesday night. Our point here tonight is not to consider and answer all of the difficult questions, our point here today is simply to see what Scripture says about the nature of God's ruling hand and to start from that foundation and then work it out from there in future messages.

Point 3 today: God's providence is personal. Psalm 139:13 says this as David is praying to God and reflecting not only on himself personally but in a representative manner you could say for all the people of God because this is true of all of us, he says in verse 13,

13 ... You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.
14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame
was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully
wrought in the depths of the earth; 16 Your eyes have seen my unformed
substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained
for me, When as yet there was not one of them. 17 How precious also are
Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Toward me, personal, first person singular, beloved. Do you see it right there in God's word? Verse 18,

18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake,
I am still with You.

He opened the Psalm in verse 1 saying,

1 LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit
down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. 3 You
scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with
all my ways. 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O
LORD, You know it all.

"God, when I lay down, You know, You're there. When I wake up, You know, You're there. What I think, You know, You're there. What I speak, even before I speak it, You know, You're there." And what we find woven throughout this doctrine of divine providence are the realities of the perfections of God, the nature of some of his incommunicable attributes. God is omnipotent, he is powerful over all. God is omniscient, he knows all. God is omnipresent, he is everywhere simultaneously. And when you take those three aspects of his perfections, you realize that it is an assertion, they all undergird this sovereign rule that he makes over all of his creation and Scripture goes to the point, we are saying that the people of God are supposed to appropriate this in a Psalm 139 way that says, "God, this means this, this means You know me intimately. It means that You have determined the number of my days. You know my thoughts before I express them with my mouth." God, beloved, planned the growth of your bones in your mother's womb, he directed that, he determined the length of your days before you were born. Jesus said in Matthew 10:30, even that all of the hairs on your head are numbered, down to those insignificant details, those things that you run your hand across your scap and hairs scatter along the way and you don't even think a thing about it. God's numbered each one of them in his omniscience.

And beloved, what this means, then, is this and we're really going to come back to this on Sunday but Tuesday is important also, you need to hear all three of these messages on divine providence. But beloved, just kind of bringing this to something that you can take out in a general way as you start your week is that God is at work in your life in every detail from the moment you were conceived to the cradle, through your youth, through your adulthood to your deathbed. God is at work in every detail of that. He is supervising, directing that to accomplish his will so that there is nothing in your life that is outside the knowledge and providential care of God. And for those of us that he has accepted in his Son, that means that he has a loving purpose in everything that has ever happened in your life or everything that ever will. None of your medical issues, none of the ways that people have sinned against you and abused you in the past, none of that has happened apart from the sovereign superintendence of God so that he is able to redeem everything that has ever happened to you bad and work it together for good, and as you look to an

uncertain future, you don't have to start with, you should never start with as you look to the future, you should never start with the thought, But what's going to happen? I don't know what's going to come. I'm concerned." No, that is not the way Christians think in light of the doctrine of divine providence. Your starting point is, "God holds the future in His hands. The God who died for me in Christ at the cross is the God who holds all of history and holds my life in His hands. I view the future with confidence, with strength, without fear because there is this fundamental trust that I have that comes from believing in this sovereign God who reigns over all." We'll work all of that out in detail next Sunday, I'm just giving you a summary overview here.

Let me ask you two questions as we close here. Do you enjoy a good and comfortable life right now? You should understand in light of divine providence that those good things that you have come from God. He has graciously blessed you and he has no ulterior motives in mind. That means that you should give him thanks and not give yourself the praise because you think you've accomplished these things by your own power. Don't be Nebuchadnezzar, you might end up eating grass for seven years. That wouldn't be good. No, all of you are blessed here and we should all walk away from this saying, "God, I see in my blessing Your hand in the details and You've been good to me. God, thank You. You've given me a mate that I love, you've given me children that are kind. You've given me so much, God, thank You. These things come from You."

Secondly, second question just by way of a little bit of application I'll ask a different question: has life brought you hardship and sadness? Is the grind of life about to seemingly extinguish your desire to continue on? Beloved, I want you to stop with the despair and think about it from this perspective: God has ordered even those things in your life. God in wisdom has allotted to you at this point in time difficulty. That changes the way that you look at them. It means that for you who are believers in Christ, it means that there are good purposes at work even in the midst of your sorrow and difficulty. Beloved, you cannot – oh, please hear me, now I'm begging you, now I'm begging you to hear me on what I'm about to say – you cannot evaluate the providence of God in a moment of time. God is working out eternal purposes. God sees the big picture. God uses hardship to accomplish good things in the end. You can't judge the disappointments of life today as an indication of what the outcome will be tomorrow.

Let me just say this, it's more than simply saying God permitted this. An Arminian could say that, although I question whether some of them would even say that much. The biblical Christian speaks and thinks differently. The biblical Christian says, "God ordered these things for my life. God brought me to this point in life. God has done this." That's what Job said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord," right? Job 1, look it up. After all of his adversity, after he lost it all at that point except his health, then he lost his health in the second chapter, after he lost it all he said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." That's the way biblical Christians talk. That's the way biblical Christians think. Beloved, it's the way biblical Christians live. It's the way we live, and what it means in the midst of your great pain is this, providence is not the reason that you turn from God and resent him and question him, providence is your hope instead that there are good purposes and that he

will deliver you from them in the end, and the fact that a good God in Christ saved you by his shed blood is over all of your life including even the difficult details, then you just reason it all the way through, "There was a purpose of love for me at the cross, there was a purpose of love for me in my salvation, in my conversion, and there is a purpose therefore of love from God even in the midst of my hardship." That's the way biblical Christians think. Are you a biblical Christian? This is the way that you are to think about everything in life.

So divine providence teaches us not to resent life, not to resent God in hardship but instead to seek him and to submit to him in trust. We'll talk about this more the next couple of messages. You really need to hear them. But your sorrow is all the more reason for you to trust in the providence of God. God is at work in your life with good purposes even if you do not understand and you cannot consciously sense it. This does not depend, look, God's providence and the power of his sovereign rule over the universe does not depend on your meager ability to perceive and understand it, right? We don't measure the goodness and the power of God by what's happening inside us and by what we feel or think. We measure it according to the lofty standard of his word which has made these things so plain to us, and by faith we affirm them even if we don't feel them in the moment because your feelings will follow where you put your faith eventually.

So beloved, as a pastor who cares for your soul I simply say to you that are suffering, give God time to prove out his providence so that you can say in the end with the Apostle Paul, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good." There's that phrase again, all things. All things. All things. All things. All things. "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Beloved, he will keep his promise because he is true and because he is over all.

Let's pray.

Friend, I could only ask whether you know this God, whether you know him in the way that he is revealed in Scripture. You can find him through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ died and rose again for the sins of everyone who believes in him. I invite you, my non-Christian friend, to repentance and faith in Christ right now. He will receive you immediately, forgive you completely, and keep you forever. Why would you turn away? Come to Christ, my friend.

Father, for those of us that know You, take these things from Your word, help us to understand them, help us to appropriate them, help us to praise You in response to them. And Father, as we go forward as individuals and as a church, help us then to trust You because we know this Christ and we know this amazing, awesome God who is over all. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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