

God Over All

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sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Sunday, August 19, 2012

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Again, just welcome. We're so happy that you're here today. We have been teaching through the book of 1 John verse by verse and over the past month or so, we taught chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, and had a significant long series there on the many truths that are contained in there about the reality of our salvation and about the reality of Christ's work and intercession and his work of propitiation on our behalf. That's what we've been doing and we've been in 1 John for a number of months now. I'm going to take a little break from 1 John for our regular attenders, I'm going to take a little break for the next three weeks probably or so including this week, because I want to do a short series on a particular doctrine that changes everything for the Christian life. It absolutely changes everything and I remember when the power of this really came home to me. It wasn't all that long ago, actually. I had lived much of my Christian life with a sense of nagging regret, second questions, second guessing certain decisions that I had made in life that had led me down a particular path. It wasn't anything bad. It wasn't anything sinful, it was just that my life came to a fork and I went right and I kept wondering, "Should I have gone left back then at that fork in the road?" And the implications of those decisions from years earlier were significant and had long-term effects and I kept thinking, "What if? What if? What if? What if?" And eventually it dawned on me over time that that can't possibly be the way the Christian life is supposed to be lived, constantly looking back. I mean, even the Apostle Paul says, "forgetting what lies behind and looking forward to what lies ahead, we press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Yet you're left with those questions about what if I had done something different in the past? Or you have a sense of regret, many of you, a sense of regret of ways that you have failed, ways that you have sinned in the past, and you are bearing the marks of that, the consequences of that even to today. Or you're looking forward, maybe you're not looking past but you look forward to the future with a sense of fear and dread and what's going to happen? Or what's going to happen in the world? What's going to happen in my life? What's going to happen with my family? And you start to dwell on these things and it has a paralyzing impact on your life because of failure to understand the implications of a particular biblical doctrine that we are going to study over the next three weeks. To the extent that you have any sense of identification with what I've said here, a sense of regret about the past, a sense of fear about the future, you desperately need to heed what we're going to be teaching over the next three weeks as we teach on the biblical doctrine of divine providence. The biblical doctrine of divine providence. We're going to do three messages including today, maybe four, but I'm very thankful for what this time together

is going to do for us and if you are visitors here and you want to follow this series but it's too far to come from South Carolina to visit us again, you can find our messages at our website truthcommunitychurch.org, and you can find our messages and follow even if you're not here physically with us.

But I am so thankful for what this time together is going to do for you. The truths that I am going to share with you over these next three weeks are things that have radically changed my life; they have changed my whole approach to life and I have to tell you, and I don't mind telling you that these were things that I didn't grasp in my years in seminary even. You know, I went through seminary for a number of years and studied a lot of stuff but somehow this stuff never clicked. Listen, you don't have to be a seminary student to understand these things. These things are right on the surface of the Bible but you need to be able to understand and appropriate them and synthesize them in your mind so that you can understand what this doctrine of divine providence means for you and the implications that it has for your spiritual life. What we're going to talk about here in these next three weeks and I say this without any fear of legitimate contradiction, it affects every moment of your life. It affects every waking thought that you have. It affects every event that could ever possibly happen to you. Everything is covered under the umbrella of this doctrine and therefore it is extremely significant.

Let me give you a working definition of divine providence is this: is 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 works to uphold his entire creation. He sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes. Now, that's a mouthful. There is a lot said in that brief sentence there and I want to kind of prepare you for what lies ahead. As we approach the doctrine of divine providence over the next few weeks, we have to lay a foundation today for everything that we're going to say. I have goals for two or three weeks from now that I'm looking to accomplish and today we're just kind of laying the groundwork. Those of you that garden know what it's like to try to prepare a plot of land to garden. You've got to dig. You've got to move rocks. You've got to make sure there is adequate water. You've got to plow the ground before you can even begin to plant, and then you plant and water and care and weed and it grows and it's a long time; it's a lot of work before you ever enjoy the fruit of that garden as you're starting it for the first time. It takes a lot of hard work before you get the benefit of it.

Now listen, beloved, I want to tell you and I want to challenge you, I want to encourage you, I want to exhort you if I can, if I can put it that way, to be prepared to do the mental work, the hard spiritual work that it's going to take to grasp and understand and appropriate, most importantly, these things that we're going to be talking about over the next few weeks. There is a lot of spiritual work that we have to do if this is new material to you, if this is new ground to you, but the hard work is necessary before you get the benefit of it, but you may not walk out this morning saying, "Oh, it's all clear and obvious to me and that changes everything." That's not how it works. This is a matter of deep meditation, of continual thought day after day after day as you work to appropriate this.

There are treasures in this doctrine that are reserved for those who are willing to, as Proverbs 2 talks about, to dig deep, to think deeply in order to appropriate what the word of God has to say here, but I assure you, I promise you on the authority of God's word, that this is worth any effort that you put into it. It is worth the hard work. It is absolutely transforming to the whole nature of your life if you come to grasp the doctrine of divine providence.

Now, today here's what we're going to do. There is a series of three or four messages here as I've said, but today all we're going to do today is we're going to simply outline what the Bible says about divine providence. We're not going to spend too much time applying it, we're not going to spend a whole lot of time talking about the difficulties that the doctrine raises, I just want you to see on the face of Scripture on things that you can read with your own eyes, I just want you to see what the Bible says about the absolute comprehensive nature of the way that God rules over his creation. I just want you to see that today and then we'll work through some of the problems and issues and difficulties that raises in the days to come.

One last time: what does the doctrine of divine providence mean? It means 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. Beloved, there has not been a single thing in your life that has happened apart from the work of God in your life. There is nothing that has happened in your life. The worst things that you can possibly think of, there is nothing that has happened in your life that God isn't taking and directing to the purposes for which he accomplished it. There is nothing like that. There is not a molecule like that in the universe because God is a God who is over all. God reigns over his creation and that's what we're going to see here today.

What I want to do here now is give you three principles. I'm just going to give you three simple principles to help you begin to understand the implications of the doctrine of divine providence. The first point for today, very plain, very simple at one level but what it means is unsearchable: the first point for this morning is that God's providence is broad. God's providence is broad. That is the beginning point for you to begin to grasp the doctrine of divine providence is to have the sense that it is broad, it is expansive, it is comprehensive. I know there is a tendency at times for us to think that we're going along and doing our lives and then something goes haywire, something goes amiss, and we call out to God and awaken him to work in this situation in a way that he wasn't beforehand, to kind of take that which was off course and put it back on course. What I want you to see, the beginning of grasping the doctrine of divine providence is that's a total miscomprehension of what God does as he reigns over his creation. There is never a situation that God hasn't been working in. There is never a time where you awaken him through his prayers and alert him to something that has gone wrong as if he hadn't already been well aware of it and thinking through it and had a plan all along for what happened. No, God's providence is broad. The Bible teaches that God's providence covers – get this – God's providence covers everything in the universe.

God's providence covers everything in the universe and to see this point, we're going to start at the book of Ephesians. We were there earlier. Ephesians 1 is where I want you to turn. Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 9, and we're going to look at a number of different Scriptures here this morning. Ephesians 1. Here in verses 3 to 14 in Ephesians 1, Paul is giving a prayer of praise to God for his work in salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. In the original Greek text, verses 3 to 14, it's one long sentence. His heart is so filled with gratitude, so bursting with praise, that the words just tumble out and dependent clauses build upon dependent clauses because his heart is so full of wonder at the majesty of God in his salvation that he has given to the church. Now as part of that majestic outpouring of praise, he addresses in verse 9, the nature of God's will and the nature in which God rules over the universe. In verse 9, he says, "He has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him," meaning what God the Father purposed in Christ, "with," here we go, hang on, fasten your seatbelts, "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 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose," look at this, "who works all things after the counsel of His will."

Now, I know you are used to reading through that in your devotions and you sweep through it in a few seconds and you move on to other things. It's a easy to read the Scriptures like that, but let's just put our foot on the brake pedal and think about what he's saying here for just a minute. Look at what he says. Look at how absolutely unqualified his statements are. He says that, "God is working out an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, the summing up of all things in Christ." Well, maybe "everything" doesn't mean everything. No, he specifies what he means, "things in the heavens and things on the earth." That pretty much covers it. We've got the globe that we live on and we've got everything else. And Paul says it is all things. It's all things in the heavens. It's all things on the earth. He is bringing into issue, he's bringing to mind the comprehensive nature of things from the beginning until the end of time. All things, he says, and look at what he says about it, he says, "we," those who belong to Christ, "we have been predestined according to His purpose." The purpose of God. This God who, what does this God do? "He works all things after the counsel of His own will," all things in the heavens, all things on the earth. God is working them out according to the counsel of his own will. He doesn't consult with anybody. He doesn't need anyone to instruct him. This great omniscient, omnipotent God is so massively in control of everything that happens in his creation that he takes it all and directs it to the purposes that he appointed before the foundation of the world. There is no room for exception in there.

Notice verse 10, there is an interesting word that I as a former attorney particularly like. This "administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is," he explains what he means by that, "the summing up of all things in Christ." The summing up. That's a word that refers to the conclusion of a speech. It's a summary that brings a focal point to the end of the speech. It's like an attorney delivering his closing argument to a jury where after an extended trial, he brings together the different points of evidence that had been presented over time, over the course of the trial, the attorney brings it together; he sums it all up into a comprehensive and cohesive whole that drives the jury to reach the

conclusion that the attorney is advocating on behalf of of his client. That's what the word means. You take all of these individual different parts and you sum them up and bring them to a focal point that fulfills the purpose of your argument.

What does that mean here in this context? Here it shows how each part of creation, each part of what has happened in the unfolding chronology of the universe, it's saying that God is going to take each part of that unfolding universal chronology and bring it together to complete the argument, to complete the purpose for which he put it all into motion in the first place. It's astounding. It's astounding. You and I don't even have a sense of what happened 100 years ago, 50 years ago. Some of you don't remember what you had for breakfast this morning. But not only is nothing lost on God like it is lost on our memories, he has been working it all together with conscious intent according to a conscious plan from the beginning of time. He is sweeping it all up. He's working it all and making sure that it all comes to the focal point of conclusion that he intended before the foundation of the world. It says that God works all things after the counsel of his own will. Nothing thwarts his divine will. Stated differently, God has complete control over everything that happens and he is directing everything that happens to accomplish his purposes. He is directing it toward an end in which all of creation will ultimately be subjected to the absolute authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. You can read about that in 1 Corinthians 15 among other places. He's directing it toward an end. The universe is moving somewhere according to the mind and the plan of God.

Now, Paul here, remember our point here this morning is that God's providence is broad. Paul here in Ephesians 1 doesn't get specific. He doesn't list out detail after detail of exactly what he means, he is simply stating the control of God in the broadest most unqualified way possible. This isn't the only place in the Bible where that is done. There are several passages which affirm God's active control, God's active work in every aspect of the universe in the broadest most unqualified sense. Write down a couple of these references as I read them: Psalm 103:19. Psalm 103:19 says that, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all." Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ "is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, and He upholds all things by the word of His power." All things. Listen, we're talking about Scripture that is inspired by God and is absolutely accurate in every detail that it presents. Everything that the Scripture affirms is absolutely true. Now, here as the Scripture is saying that God's sovereignty rules over all and it says "all things," and it says it repeatedly over and over again, "all things, all things, it rules over all," beloved, let it sink into your mind that "all things" means all things. That's really important. Without a doubt, there are areas in your mind, there are areas in your heart where you make exceptions. You unconsciously carve out exceptions as if God wasn't at work when such and such a thing happened in your past. The starting of embracing and understanding and appropriating the doctrine of divine providence is to shed the light of what Scripture says about all things onto those corners of your heart that you think could not possibly be true.

Turn to the book of Colossians just a few pages to the right in your Bibles from Ephesians. Of course you know that. You're people that read your Bible. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians 1, speaking about Christ in verse 15, it says that, "He is the image

of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." It doesn't mean that Christ was created in the sense that he was born in that way, it means that he has preeminence over all creation; he rules over all creation. Verse 16, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible." See how it fleshes out? Visible and invisible, that kind of covers it, doesn't it? Things that you can see and things that you can't see. It's all included there. "Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Look at that last clause again: in Him all things hold together. He is holding it all together, four times in those two verses it says "all things, all things, all things, all things."

Let me give you a technical definition of "all things": all things means all things. All things means all things, beloved. God's providence is absolutely broad. It is broad in an unqualified sense and so let me pull this altogether, what we've said so far. God's providence is as broad as you can possibly imagine and then it is broader even than that. Your mind cannot embrace the totality of how broad the providence of God is. Over and over again, the Bible says that God reigns over all. He gives life to all. He holds all things together in Christ. He moves all things to achieve his purposes. What does that mean? It means that the stars stay in their orbit because of the active work of God who purposefully holds them there. It means that your arms stay attached to your body because of the sovereign work of God. It means that your chair is holding you up in place because God is making it to do so. He holds all things together. How long should I go on? How long should I multiply the examples?

Now listen to me, beloved: you could not deny God's active rule over all of creation without denying the Bible. That's how clear it is. That's how comprehensive and unqualified it is. You couldn't deny that without denying the Scripture and I believe that none of you here are prone to do that; none of you want to do that and so I'm not going to spend any more time discussing this aspect of it and I'm not going to waste my time today addressing the foolishness of atheists except to say this, that atheists would not even be able to spout their empty vanities if God didn't give them the breath to do so. The presence of atheists is no denial of this doctrine, the presence of atheists is a confirmation of what the Bible says about the foolishness of man when he says there is no God.

God's providence is broad. It is absolutely broad and I think most of you here today already believe that so I'm not going to spend any more time trying to conquer ground that the Spirit of God has already worked out in your heart. Where you may wrestle with God's providence is not in affirming the general principle but where you probably wrestle with God's providence and resting in God's providence is in the details, particularly as they relate to your personal difficulties: past regrets, worries about the future either in the world at large, "Where is this world going?" or in your own personal circumstances. That is the ground, that personal level of detail concern; questions, uncertainty, that is the spiritual ground that we intend to conquer in this series here. That is the ground where the rubber meets the road for a severe lack of a better term, where the Christian life and trusting God is lived out. The power of the doctrine of providence is reinforced greatly when you see the Bible declare it in its details and that brings us to our second point. It's

one thing to say God's providence is broad, it's another thing to see this second point: that God's providence is detailed. It is broad but it's also detailed and you'll see what I mean by that. The Bible applies this doctrine of divine providence, it asserts the rule of God over details that you and I wouldn't even think about and it is as you consider those details that there is a cumulative impact on your thinking, a cumulative impact on your heart as you see detail after detail after detail added up to support the general statement that God's providence is broad. You start to say, "Oh, it's in this detail. Oh, it's in this detail. You know, it's in that detail." And the doctrine of providence starts to run with your heart; it starts to run with your mind when you see it in the details and that's what we're going to do now. It's one thing to say God controls everything, it's another thing to list out patiently item after item after item where the Bible asserts this truth in the clearest and most unmistakable way.

Where is the detail of God's providence found? I'm going to give you four sub points here under point 2. First of all, you see God's providence in nature. In nature. Turn to Psalm 147, and I'm only giving you representative passages here today. I daresay that everything that we're going to see, particularly in this second point, could be reinforced by multiplied cross references but we're just going to make the point for now. God's providence is detailed in nature. Psalm 147, look at verse 7 with me. Psalm 147:7, "Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; Sing praises to our God on the lyre, Who," what does this God do? Why do we praise him? Why do we thank him? He's going to support that call to worship with individual detailed statements about the greatness of God that are designed to provoke your heart to worship. "Who," why should I sing and praise and thank this God? Well, listen, this is the God, "Who," verse 8, "covers the heavens with clouds, Who provides rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains. He gives to the beast its food, And to the young ravens which cry." Clouds. Rain. Grass, food for brute animals. Look down at verse 15, "He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold? He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow." How specific is that, beloved. God causes the clouds in the sky, the rain upon the earth and even causes the grass to grow. You can see a reflection of that in 1 Corinthians 3 when Paul is talking about the work of the Gospel and the teaching of the word, "Apollos planted, I watered, but God was causing the growth." It is drawing upon that important spiritual principle is based upon an analogy to the physical realm in which it also holds true. You see, the Bible says that nature runs its course. Not from the inherent power of biological or climatological processes, but from God who directs these things and causes them to happen. God is orchestrating nature. He is working through every aspect of it. A point of application: if there is such a thing as global warming, Christians shouldn't be too worried about it, shouldn't be too worked up about it, because God is in control and actively working in and through the climate to accomplish his purposes. And by the way, if you read 2 Peter 3, you're going to find a real instance of global warming when God judges the earth with fire. Then a couple of degrees difference in the polar ice caps isn't going to seem like too big a deal. God's providence rules over nature but we must move on.

God's providence is also specific in this second way, we've already hinted at it, it's specific over the animal kingdom. It's specific over the animal kingdom. Turn back to Psalm 104:24, and let me just remind you gently that all we're doing right now is we're just getting the facts on the table. We're just getting the facts on the table. We're not assuming anything, we're just seeing what the Bible says. We're getting the facts on the table and later we're going to say what these facts mean and how they impact your Christian life.

Psalm 104, beginning in verse 24, God's providence rules over the animal kingdom. "O LORD, how many are Your works!" What God is actively doing, "O God, we praise you for how many they are." Apparently it's so many that it goes beyond the realm of human comprehension and thus inspires the Psalmist to praise. "How many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions. There is the sea, great and broad, In which are swarms without number, Animals both small and great. There the ships move along, And Leviathan, which You have formed to sport in it. They all," all of those sea creatures, "they all wait for You To give them their food in due season. You give to them, they gather it up; You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good. You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire And return to their dust." This is a comprehensive picture of God caring for the animal kingdom and it describes their eating and their going, their living and their dying is coming from his hand. Animals live and eat and died because of the active providence of God. In Matthew 6:25-34, it says that God feeds the birds of the air. In Matthew 10 it says that sparrows die at his command; "not one of them falls apart from the hand of your Father," Jesus said. Places and things and animals and creatures that we don't even care about, God's providence is actively working caring for them, directing them to accomplish his purposes. The brute animals in Mongolia are under his care. The horses in Lexington are under his care. All of these things the Bible ascribes to the active work, the providence of God, ruling over his creation.

The weather. The animals. Thirdly, God's providence also extends over, the third sub point here: seemingly chance events. Seemingly chance events Proverbs 16:33 is the classic text on that. Proverbs 16:33 says this, it says that, "The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD." The modern day equivalent of a lot would be like the rolling of the dice or the flipping of a coin. God determines what comes up in his providence. He controls details that you and I would consider insignificant but, I mean, think about it, the whole gaming industry, the whole gambling industry, Las Vegas and Rising Sun and all those other places, people lose – get this – people lose billions of dollars in gambling each year because God directs the outcome of games of so-called chance. Matthew Henry, the great Puritan commentator says this and listen to this quote carefully, "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 blind fortune but everything comes to pass by the will and counsel of God. What man has neither eye nor hand in, God is intimately concerned in." Listen to that first line again: the divine providence orders and directs those things which to us are perfectly casual and fortuitous. The fact that you and I view something as too insignificant to give our attention to is not the measure by which God operates his divine

providence. You must understand that because mockers will come and talk about something really insignificant and say, "Do you think God cares whether you turn left or right to go home?" Well yes, God is actively at work in all of that.

This is the teaching of the Bible and, listen, let's step back and remember a more fundamental point, something that's just really crucial here: it is our responsibility as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to bring our minds into subjection to the teaching of Scripture. It is our responsibility to think God's thoughts after him. We do not have the liberty to think, to assert, to act like the universe operates according to one principle when the Bible says it operates according to the principle of divine providence. And so we have a divine responsibility to take these things seriously, to appropriate them and, listen, to believe them. We do not have liberty to say the Bible is wrong; that I disagree with that. No, our blessed privilege is to think biblically. Our blessed privilege is to say, "Oh, the Bible says this? Then that is by definition what I also want to believe. I do believe what the Bible says." That's our responsibility. To disagree with the Scripture is to call God a liar. It's an act of high-handed rebellion. You don't want to do that, do you? I don't and I don't believe you do either, but it's hard work to think along these lines.

We're talking about an unseen reality, right? This is an unseen reality. Sometimes providence bubbles up to the surface and you can see it clearly as happened when it worked out for you and I to get together over time. That was amazing. The clarity of providence. But a lot of times it's hidden from our view. It's beneath the surface. But listen, you wouldn't deny it just because you can't see it, would you? Just get into the river and that which you can't see on the surface, when you're in the river there is a force carrying you, right? There is a current underneath the surface of the water that is directing that water to go where it goes and you feel that even though you don't see it on top of the surface. Well, in the same way in the operation of the universe, God's providence is the current directing the direction in which it goes, and the fact that you don't always see it is not a denial of its existence. Truth is not measured by what you see. Truth is proclaimed by what the Bible says and here it's really clear on all of these issues.

So, we've said that God's providence is active in nature, it's active in the animal kingdom, it's active in chance events. Let's go to a fourth sub point here, let's go from the micro view of the roll of the dice, let's go from a micro view to the macro view and see what Scripture says about that because in this fourth sub point, we're going to see that God rules over the nations. God rules over the nations. I alluded to Proverbs, turn to Proverbs 21. Proverbs 21, beginning in verse 1 and, again, I can't emphasize enough to you that I'm just giving you small sample representative passages here. We could multiply these ad infinitum. Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes."

Daniel 2. Turn to Daniel 2, just after Ezekiel. Daniel 2, I want you to see this with your own eyes. I could have just read it. I would have been happy to do that but I'm even happier for you to see it with your own eyes. Daniel 2, beginning in verse 19, "the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven." Why, Daniel, are you blessing God? "Daniel said, 'Let the name of God be

blessed forever and ever." I'll tell you why I say that. "For," because this reason, because "wisdom and power belong to Him." Look at this in verse 21, a colossal statement, "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding. It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him."

Look at verse 21 again, "He removes kings and establishes kings." Listen, world powers, kings and presidents, have their authority only because God has given it to them. He raises men up and he casts them down. If you're interested in reading about that in particular read the books of 1 and 2 Kings and you'll see over and over again that principle being stated. World powers, world rulers, have their authority only because God has given it to them. They rise and fall at his command. Barack Obama became President of the United States ultimately only because it pleased God to give that authority to him and while Christians may dislike the politics of that, they should trust and remember the providence of God in that as they look on the world scene, and if you dislike the politics, remember that we're not living for this world anyway, right?

So, what have we seen here? Let's back up. You can think of God's providence on a comprehensive continuum. You can think about it in the smallest of details, what the fish off the island of Guam is eating right now, God's providence. Roll of the dice, God's providence. You can think of it on the biggest scale possible, Barack Obama is President in the providence of God because God is actively directing world affairs to accomplish his purposes. From the micro that you don't even think about to the macro that you have no control over and – get this – at every point in between on that continuum, God is ruling over all and directing everything to accomplish his purposes. He rules over the smallest things, the biggest things and all things in between. That is the teaching of the Bible. Listen, it is intrinsic, it is inherent in the definition of what it means to be God. God is God. God rules over all. He's not a local deity that just has a small little realm that he's taking control over and everything else is outside, God is God and he is God over all. Do you understand that?

Now, point 3, and listen, I want you to understand that I'm not up here primarily to have a theological discussion. I'm up here for totally pastoral reasons because I want the good of your soul. I want you to live in light of the goodness of God and the love of God that is on your life if you're a Christian. That's why we're talking about this. That's why this is so emphatically important to me. I want you to have the benefit of these truths and to appropriate them into your lives and have your lives changed by what we're talking about here. So point 3 is this: God's providence is personal. God's providence is personal. It is personal to you. He isn't just reigning over these big and small things in an abstract impersonal way, he is also simultaneously exercising divine providence, perfect control over all things in your life by name. By name, beloved.

Now listen, God's providence is personal. I'm going to take a really short tangent here. Over the past few weeks, we've been making this same point in terms of salvation. We've said that Christ died for you by name; that the work of Christ, the intercession of Christ in

heaven, his work on the cross was for you by name, not for a sense of generic humanity. He was doing it for you. Now, all we're saying here, we're expanding from the realm of salvation for those of you that like the technical theological terms, we're expanding from soteriology into the totality of life; into the day to day nature of your existence. Oh, this is so important. God's providence is intensely intimately personal.

Psalm 139, please. Turn there with me. Psalm 139:13, a familiar passage. David, we've had Daniel speaking about the rule of God, here we have David expressing it in the most personal of terms. Here's how I want you to think: what you're about to see here is simply an application of what we've already said. We've said that God's providence is broad, in the broadest of terms, and if you just start to think through it, you would naturally come to what we're going to see here in verse 13. It's broad. It's over all things. It's detailed. It's in the details of things. Well, how far do those details go? They go to the hidden depths of your mother's womb, that's how far they go.

Look at Psalm 139:13, "For You," O LORD. Verse 1, "O LORD," that's who he's addressing; that's who he's talking to is Yahweh. "O LORD, You have searched me and known me," verse 1. Verse 13, "For You," the antecedent of "You" is this LORD, "You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well." You see, you're intended to know this at a heart experiential level. Verse 15, "My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; 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." From the formation of your bones in your mother's womb to the length of your days here on earth, Scripture teaches that God planned it all and was personally actively involved in the outworking of every detail from the cradle to the grave and all points in between. Wow. Wow. You need to spend a few days thinking about that, rehearsing your life in light of that, beloved. Matthew 10:30 says "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Some with a small number, some with a bigger number.

Here's the only point of all of that, beloved: that is a testament to how personal his providence is; how broad and how detailed his providence is. Nothing in your life will ever escape the active involvement of his hand. And listen, nothing in your past has escaped the involvement of his providential hand. Nothing because God's providence is broad and it is detailed and it's personal. The consequences, the implications of what we're saying here go everywhere in your life. The course of your life is not determined by the terms of nature; the rise and fall of nations; your circumstances are not determined by chance, blind faith, astrology or the devil himself. You are not the victim of circumstances, you are a recipient of the wise and good providence of God. You must come to that conviction if you're not already there. God is actively ruling through everything that happens both good and bad and that changes the way you view the world, it changes the way you view your life, it changes the way you look at the past, it changes the way you look at the future, it changes the way you look at right now. It changes everything.

Now, three points of conclusion here. You can make this a fourth point if you want to, conclusion. That's how it reads in my notes but that's not very homiletically impressive. What can we draw out of this? Now listen, remember there is a whole lot more that we're going to say about this in the next couple of weeks. There is a whole lot more. Not trying to answer every difficulty or every question here today, just getting the facts on the table so we can think about them.

The first conclusion is one of self-examination. One of self-examination. How are you personally related to this God who reigns overall? He has appointed only one way to find the forgiveness of your sins and that's through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are outside of Christ today, not a Christian, don't even care about what we're talking about here today, listen, this ought to strike fear in your heart. It ought to strike fear in your heart that you are indifferent and rebellious against a God who reigns over all and holds every detail of your life and the days of your life in the palm of his hand. How could you be indifferent to that? This brings a word of warning to those who are not Christians and I call you to Christ if that's you.

Secondly, a couple of questions now. Do you enjoy a good and comfortable life? Life has gone pretty good? Listen, the doctrine of divine providence teaches you that those good things have come from the hand of God. It's not the product ultimately of your great skill and wisdom. It didn't happen apart from that but God has blessed the labors of your hands to put you in that position. If that's you, what this means is that the providence of God in your life has led you to a place that you like. If that's you, then your only possible appropriate response would be one of gratitude. "O God, I look around and I see my life and I am so grateful to you that you have ordered my circumstances in such a pleasant way. You have been so good to me." And it humbles you.

Thirdly, has life brought you hardship and sadness? It's you that I most want to address. I've been in your shoes. I've been under the cloud of seeming darkness, discouraged. And when you think it through with a modicum of informed theology, you realize that the hardship that you've gone through is something that God could have prevented at the very least, "He could have prevented this but he didn't and now I'm caught in this place of ruin, this place of sorrow, this place of discouragement. Now what?" At that point, you start to say, "Maybe God's not really in control. Maybe he's not really loving. Maybe he's unfair because I sure don't like this. Either way, why should I trust him if this is the way that life is going to work out?" Listen to me carefully, listen to me very carefully: your sorrow and discouragement is all the more reason for you to lay hold of the doctrine of divine providence. Yes, God brought that pain into your life but step back, beloved, step back and think about what the Bible is saying here. Yes, God brought that pain into your life but God's providence is your certain hope that there is divine purpose and divine meaning in your trials. It's the certainty that God is going to bring something good out of it. It is the certainty that you're not the victim of what someone else has done to you, the way that people have sinned against you in the past. You're not the recipient of unrestrained evil. God was at work in all of it. God is at work in all of it right now according to his wisdom, according to his goodness, with the specific intent from the

counsel of his will to bring glory to his name and to bring good to your life if you're a Christian. You have to step back and say, "Okay, there is more to this than what I see and feel right now." You take your sorrows and you put them in the context of a wise and loving providence and all of a sudden the whole perspective has changed. Listen, what we said last week, 1 John 2:2, Christ died for you by name. The same Christ, the same God that ordered your salvation, made certain that you would belong to Christ and be with him in eternal glory forever with all of your sins forgiven, is the same God who is orchestrating the details of your personal life as well, and there is no disconnect from the love of Christ hanging on the cross to the manifestation of the love of God in the details of the providence of your life. There is no disconnect. It's the exact same loving purpose of God being worked out.

So, beloved, remember the context of this, has life brought you hardship and sadness, in light of everything that we've said, here's what I can say to you based on the authority of God's word: don't resent God, seek him. Don't doubt him, trust him. Give him time to work out and to prove the greatness of his loving purposes and the greatness of his loving providence in your life. What you're in the midst of today is not the end of the story, right? You don't know what tomorrow holds. You don't know how God might turn things. Remember the life of Joseph, buried in an Egyptian jail for two years with no hope of release. Now, the point's not that God is going to suddenly make everything bright and happy for you, the point is that God is in control of it and you can trust him for that. Give him time to prove the greatness of his providence. Settle it in your mind that whatever else anyone else is doing, whatever else anyone else around me says, you think vertically at this point and you say, "God, you are going to find me walking day by day, step by step, confident and trusting in you and no earthly circumstance is going to dissuade me to the contrary because I believe in your providence. I believe in your goodness. I believe in your love and one day you will vindicate my trust in you." That's what this doctrine of divine providence does for your heart. Beloved, given time until you are in the position where you can experientially say with the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." Did you hear that? We come back to that word again, "all things for good for those who love him."

If you're a Christian, you are under the hand of a wise and benevolent divine providence. Sometimes the shadows fall over the light of that. Anchor your mind in this truth and you find the direction and clarity that your heart is longing for.

We're going to have more to say about this over the next couple of weeks. For now, I invite you to bow with me in prayer.

Father, as the musicians come up, our minds and our hearts have been stretched by your word today. It's so incomprehensible to us that there could be a living intelligent being who is in control of everything that's ever happened since the beginning of time. It's beyond our comprehension that there could be one of such great power that he orchestrates everything that happens to accomplish his will. Father, it's beyond our comprehension that out of the expanses of the galaxies, that you have your eye on the

sparrow and we have the assurance from Scripture that you have your eye on us as well. We see your love manifested at the cross of Christ, Christ dying, interposing his own blood for the sake of our salvation; risen, ascended to heaven, interceding on our behalf; our name on his heart, our well-being on the shoulders of his omnipotence representing us in heaven. All of these things, Father, are so far beyond our comprehension and yet we see them in your word and we believe what you have said and we realize that we are the beneficiaries of great unspeakable grace.

And Father, I pray for these beloved friends in front of me today suffering, discouraged, feeling the weight of family issues that threaten to pull them under the tide. Father, here in the doctrine of divine providence, let them find their hope, let them find their anchor. Father, refresh their minds. Refresh their hearts. Renew their joy with the assurance that not only are you in perfect control, but that you are faithful. So Father, give them the courage not to give up but to persevere. And Father, we ask you as people dependent upon your word, people believing your word, honoring you and dependent upon you, Father, in response to that, we ask you with assurance and yet with urgency that you would fulfill your promise to us in your perfect and providential timing. Give us grace that we might walk with you in the warm light of a perfect divine providence. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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