

**Acts 7: 17-29; “Moses and God’s Providence”, Sermon # 30 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on July 19th, 2015, in the Morning Worship.**

God’s providence, it says in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is “His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all of His creatures and all of their actions.” This means that He orders all things that happen, according to His own will and for His own glory in the outworking of the history of men and nations. The purposes of God in His providence may seem very mysterious to us, and difficult to understand. But with God, all things related to His own actions are very definite and certain in relation to what He intends to do at any point in human history. He intends, through mere men, to bring glory to His own great name. Whether it is in the history of Christ’s Church and the furtherance of His kingdom, or whether it is in regard to the part that you as a Christian shall play in these things, God is perfectly sovereign. This is why it is such a valuable thing that we have Stephen’s Scripture history of Israel, which he gave in sermonic form to these resistant men. Stephen died for preaching this sermon. He died in trying to make the point, that the same God who ordained all the events related to Moses’ ministry to the people of his day, was the same God who was evaluating these stubborn men in regard to their rejection of Jesus Christ. So, there are some definite lessons for us to learn from this passage, about God’s providence, which I believe will apply to each of here today. 1st of all – The providence of God wisely governed the rise of an evil man. 2nd – The providence of God wisely superintended the rise of a good man. And 3rd – The providence of God patiently taught Moses His way of doing things. May God give us the grace to learn these lessons and store them up in our hearts so that we will be strong in the evil day.

1st of all – God wisely governed the rise of an evil man.

(Verses 17-19)

In God’s time, according to God’s purpose, there is always a set time for the fulfillment of His purpose in regard to His promises. It is specifically mentioned in verses 17 and 18 – “But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph.” This is referring to the time when God promised to deliver Israel out of their of their four hundred years of affliction and bondage, and bring them into the land of Canaan to inherit it. God had sworn to Abraham in Genesis 15: 13 – “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.” “And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” You can see here how God was able to perfectly foresee what would come to pass hundreds of years later. He foresaw this because He is Omniscient in His being. He knows the beginning from the end, and He is the first and the last. He is able to look down the corridors of time; past, present, and future, and see all the things that will come to pass, and all the implications of those things, perfectly well. But I want you to see that God is able to see these things because He has first ordained that all of these things will come to pass. These two truths are connected. God is the One who guides men and nations because He has an eternal purpose behind His governing. His purpose is, that the people who He has made, would take notice of the glory of two of His great attributes, His mercy and His justice. It was God who in mercy raised Moses up and sent him to the nation of Israel to be their deliverer. And it was God, who in His justice and power, raised Pharaoh up and made Him king of Egypt.

Let’s look at the glorifying of God’s justice and power first, in the raising up of Pharaoh. Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 9, and we will look at verses 14-23. “What shall we say then?” “Is there unrighteousness with God?” “Certainly not!” “For He says to Moses, ‘I will

have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’” “Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” “You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault?’ “For who has resisted his will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?” “Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ “Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” “What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

God has a great purpose in the outworking of individual people’s lives whether they are ordinary everyday people, or whether they are kings. Indeed, it is only because of God’s purpose that a particular person is raised up to be a king, or to be an important person of any sort. And those who are more ordinary, His purpose for them is no less important. God says here in this passage, that He had a purpose in raising up the Pharaoh. He knew when He raised Pharaoh up to that position, that he would oppress His people. He knew what was in Pharaoh’s sinful heart and He did not approve of it for a minute. But it was God’s purpose to show His power; to demonstrate His power, as it says in the New American Standard translation. What He was demonstrating was the attribute of His power in relation to His justice, and to His freeing His people from bondage. Pharaoh was a very unrighteous king, who our text says “dealt treacherously” with the children of Israel and oppressed them, even making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. He was extremely selfish in His kingly power. He saw that the children of Israel were becoming very numerous and mighty, and so he said: “Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.” He did not have any reason to think any such thing. He was simply selfish enough to use this as an excuse for his putting them in bondage. Did he not remember Joseph and all the good that he had done for Egypt in a precious generation? No, he did not know and he did not care. He made them his slaves and oppressed them, even expecting them to make bricks without straw, in their labors in building things for him.

Why did God ordain all this? Why did He permit it? It was that He expects all men, even kings, to recognize Him as God, and to submit to His good and righteous preceptive will; in other words, to glorify Him by obeying Him. But all men by nature do not want to do this because of Adam’s sin. And in this disobedience, some men are more disobedient than others. All men are fallen in their nature from their birth, but God has determined to have a purpose even for wicked men. Proverbs 16: 4 says: “The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.” In other words, God has the power, as the potter does over the clay, to make one vessel, that is one person like Pharaoh, a vessel of His wrath, to demonstrate to all people everywhere, in all generations, that it will not avail any person to resist His will. He wants to make known His power, and in the process of that, He will endure with much patience, Pharaoh, this vessel of wrath, so that His name may be declared in all the earth.

Let’s see how God dealt righteously and justly in power with this great sinner, the Pharaoh. He dealt with him by His word being spoken by Moses and Aaron to him, to show him His will, and to bring plagues upon the him and the people of Egypt if they did not heed what God said to them. Listen to Exodus chapter 7, verses 1-5: “So the Lord said to Moses: ‘See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.’” “You shall speak all that I command you.” “And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of

his land.” “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.” “But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.” And certainly this did come to pass in just the way that the Lord said. When Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’” Pharaoh said: “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?” “I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.” If we were to take the time to read the rest of the account of the interactions between Moses and Pharaoh, and the plagues that God sent upon Pharaoh for his stubborn resistance to doing the Lord’s will, we would find that as Pharaoh hardened his heart that the Lord would further harden it himself; confirming him in this state of sin and rebellion. Never think that this hardening was something that was first sent by God before Pharaoh had done anything wrong. No, the hardening always was God’s response to what Pharaoh had already first done in his own heart. The Lord was very wise in His dealings with him. He used all of the greatest of Pharaoh’s strong resistance to the command – “Let My people go”, to prove that He could overcome all of Pharaoh’s evil purposes and actually turn them all around for good, for the people of God.

Dear Christian, do you realize that it is the same with us today? We are facing the prospect of many oppositions to our righteous cause of promoting the glory of our God, and the great salvation which can only be found in Jesus Christ. We are facing great opposition to our being able to live out our convictions in a country where we supposedly have religious freedom. The 1st Amendment to our Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law in respect to an establishment of religion or the free exercise of the same”; and yet, we find the Supreme Court of our land issuing a ruling that acts as the writing of a law; so that people are being jailed for the exercise of their Christian faith and trying to do what is right. I am speaking now of people who will not support or celebrate the homosexual agenda. Stand firm, dear Christian. Our God has His eye on His people’s good in every one of their afflictions. He has his eye on you for good when you take your stand for His cause of truth, and meekness, and righteousness. Our Lord says: “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake.” “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!” “For indeed your reward is great in heaven.” “For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.” Remember that God was wise and holy in His raising up of this evil man Pharaoh. It was done in order that he might be destroyed forever. God worked in this particular way so that He would accomplish all of His good purposes toward His elect people.

2nd - God wisely superintended the rise of a good man. (Verses 20-22)

“At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months.” “But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.” “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” I like the way that the New American Standard puts it: When Moses was born he was “lovely in the sight of God”. The King James says that “he was exceeding fair”; he was fair to God, that is. God knew what He was doing when He put this man Moses together. He may have had a physical beauty, but there was accompanying this, a beauty of soul and spirit according to the way that God created Moses. It is not that he was without sin, or that he did not have a sinful nature like all the rest of us descended from Adam. It was that God showed, even in the way that He created him that He had great purposes for this man; purposes which had to do with His becoming a great leader and a prophet. God was going to watch over him with a great amount of prevenient and common grace to make sure that he did not die, after he was first born. He had special grace waiting in the wings for Moses; grace that was waiting for God’s time to lay hold of him. God by His providence would make sure that he would live, and that he would, more than any other man, represent His holy law, and be a

mediator of the Old Covenant and its glory, in certain definite and important ways. It was only grace that made Moses to differ. It is only grace which makes us to differ. This is why we pray the prayer of Moses, the man of God which is recorded in Psalm 90, verse 17 – “And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes establish the work of our hands. The beauty of the Lord is that He gives grace to people of His choosing. Moses was well-pleasing to God, it says in verse 20 of our text. And even though the Pharaoh’s edict was crying for his death, he was still able to live in his father’s house for three months because God would have it that way.

Let us all confess that the handiwork of God is to be admired in the creation of each one of us; but the beauty of the Lord being upon us is not meant to lead us to pride, but to humility and to have a thankful heart and a thoughtful mind. Let us be reminded of how skillful God was, in making us. Listen to Psalm 139, verses 13-16: “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb.” “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.” “My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.” “Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.” “And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.” Moses’ parents saw his beauty and they did something about it, it says in Hebrews 11: 23 – “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command.”

The king’s edict was that “Every son who is born, was to be cast into the river.” And so, when Moses’ mother Jochebed saw that she could no longer hide him, she made an ark of bulrushes and placed him in it, and she laid the little ark in the reeds by the river’s bank. Here the providence of God was at work once again. How great is God’s care in the lives of His people. This mother knew that she must throw her child into the river, and so she reasoned to herself that if she must throw him in, she would make very carefully provision for him so that he will float on the water, and not drown because of her actions. She prays a prayer and pushes him off into the reeds. His sister Miriam stands afar off to know what will happen to him. Then the daughter of Pharaoh comes down to bathe at the river, along with her maids. She sees the basket and she has her maids go to get it. When she opens it, she sees the child, and he is crying. She has compassion on him; immediately she recognizes that this is one of the Hebrew’s children. Daughter Miriam runs up and asks the Pharaoh’s daughter: “Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you? And wonder of wonders, she says: “Go”. So she goes, and calls her mother and Pharaoh’s daughter says to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” “So the woman took the child and nursed him, it says.”

Listen to what Thomas Scott, the commentator says about these things: “The manner in which the great Ruler of the world accomplishes his secret purposes, without at all interfering with the free agency of his rational creatures, by imperceptibly leading them, in following their own inclinations and judgments, to such measures as coincide with his plans, is very observable in all these circumstances.” “With what admiring joy and gratitude must Moses’ mother have engaged in her delightful office!” “And how must she have adored the hand of God, in so marvelously answering, and far exceeding, her believing expectations!” (End of quote) And we can see how truly great God’s providence was at this point, in Moses’ being saved from death by Pharaoh’s daughter, when we read that “the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. None of these things came about by accident. It was all part of the greater plan of God to raise Moses up to greatness. Because we read in our text in Acts 7: 22 that Moses, being her adopted son, “became learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in words and deeds”.

Moses got the best education in the world of that day. Philo, the Jew, says that he learned arithmetic, geometry, and every branch of music, the hieroglyphics, the Assyrian language, and Chaldean knowledge of the heavens, and yet he was not a magician, or skilled in unlawful arts.” John Gill says concerning the phrase – “and was mighty in words”: “He had a command of language, and a large flow of words, and could speak properly and pertinently upon any subject; for though he was slow of speech, and of tongue, and might have somewhat of a stammering in speaking, yet he might have a just diction, a masculine style, and a powerful eloquence, and the matter he delivered might be very great and striking.” On the phrase – “mighty in deeds; or in “his deeds”, Gill says: “He was a man of great abilities, and fit for business both in the government as an advisor, and in the field.” “Josephus relates an expedition of his against the Ethiopians, whilst he was in Pharaoh’s court, in which he obtained victory over them, when the Egyptians had been greatly oppressed by them; in which his prudence and fortitude were highly commended.” (End of quote) So Moses was in a very high place of preferment, and he was in a position to be raised up to a very high position in the government of Egypt in the future. And yet his heart was not desirous of this kind of promotion. This dissatisfaction with the expectations of the worldly people in Egypt, came about as a result of the providential ordering and working of God. I would assume that during this time of his growing up years that he continued to have some amount of contact with his birth mother, who at some point early-on, revealed to him that she was his real mother, and also related to him many things about the worship and the word of the only true and living God. She no doubt prayed for him, and with him.

And so I believe that it was by this means, according to God’s providential timing of things, that by the time Moses came to be of college age, he had probably come to know the Lord for Himself. He had come to believe in the true and living God. You see, God had a plan, and He so He led Moses step by step, so that he would come to a place where He could raise him up to true greatness and real godliness in his sight. Because God extended grace to him, he would not be overcome by the world’s view of what was important in life. Oh that each of us would see just how involved God is in ordering all things in our lives according to His purpose, and for our good; that some of us might become Christians by hearing the gospel at our mother’s knee, after talking over with her all the important subjects in life, and listening to the wisdom which God has given her. The subjects of faith in God, repentance, self-denial, and obedience were spoken of; and then the Spirit of God moved and worked in your heart, and you came to terms with what life means. Moses was given great natural gifts; a great mind to discern things, great ability in logic and the art of persuasion. He had great ability to do all of what he purposed to do in wisdom, and with power. And yet, mercifully, God also opened His heart to see spiritual truth, and to receive good discernment in who his closest friends should be. This is mercy indeed; that your closest friends should be the people of God.

And this leads me 3rdly to observe - The providence of God patiently taught Moses His way of doing things.

For it says in Hebrews 11: 24, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward.” At some point there came a time where Moses had to make a choice. Was he going to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter and strive to rise to worldly wealth, influence, and power? Was he going to go out to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin for a season? Or was he going to choose to suffer affliction with the people of God. He chose the latter, and in doing so, the text in Hebrews 11 tells us that he was esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.” Moses no doubt knew, from his mother, and others of his brethren, that someday the Promised Seed, the Messiah would come to their people and crush the serpent’s head, and purchase

redemption for them, even as the story of Abraham offering up Isaac had typified. Moses believed this; he identified himself deliberately with the chosen people of God as his own people. He therefore was willing to forsake the passing pleasures of sin. Therefore he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. He was looking forward to the reward. "What reward?", you say.

Well, it was the reward, first of all, of seeing his people freed from their bondage. The reward would culminate in eternal glory of knowing Christ and being freed from sin and the curse of the law, and dwelling with Christ forever. But it would all come at the Lord's time and in the Lord's way. Our text in verse 23 says – "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel, and seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian." "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand." "And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?'" "But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?'" "I want you to understand, my brethren, that sometimes when God is calling man to do a great thing for Him, other people, other brethren, may not understand. God was raising up Moses to do this great work of leading the children of Israel out of their bondage; he knew that it was so. But he did not know how to go about doing this great work. He thought that he had to take matters into his own hands, and enact the work of justice and deliverance on his own initiative. He did not understand how God does His work. He did not understand what it would take to free the children of Israel. He did not understand that he needed to submit to God's training, God's timing, and God's authority. He did not understand how much he needed to wait upon the Lord to show him how to begin.

And so it says in verse 29, "At this saying, he fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons." Moses had some things to learn about how God does His work. God does His work with His choice servants by first humbling them and showing their own insufficiency to bring about the good God-glorifying results that he is calling them to. It cannot be done by their own might or power, but by His Spirit. This, it would take Moses 40 years to learn. Moses went to Midian and met Jethro and his daughters, and it says that Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave him his daughter Zipporah. And she bore him a son, and called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land.'" And then it says, "In the process of time, the king of Egypt died." "And the children of Israel groaned because of their bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of their bondage." "So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and with Jacob." "And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them." And then in Chapter 3 of Exodus it says that Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian." "And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God." And here God met him in His great and powerful and wonderful providence. "The Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush." "So he looked, and behold the bush was burning with fire but the bush was not consumed."

We will have to leave the story of Moses at this point in time and await the next message to learn the lessons that Moses learned. They are lessons about the holiness of God and about himself; what he was capable of doing if God was with him. It is enough that you and I understand that the providence of God is very real in the life of every Christian. And every Christian as they trust in the Lord will have to come to terms with God's providence in their life. He will not always do things the way that you would want to do things. But His way of doing things and His timing will be perfect, and all of His purposes will come to pass in just the way that bring glory to His holy name. And will you not be thankful that it is so? I think you will.

