

# DOCTRINE MATTERS: ESSENTIAL TRUTHS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

## Message 12: God's Providence

### **Psalm 115:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> *Our God is in the heavens; **he does all that he pleases.***

### **Isaiah 46:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> *... remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,*  
<sup>10</sup> *declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and **I will accomplish all my purpose ...***

### **2 Kings 19:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> *"Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? **I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass ...***

### **Ephesians 1:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who **works all things according to the counsel of his will ...***

### **Job 23:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> *But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? **What he desires, that he does.***

**Divine providence** is God's preserving his creation,  
operating in every event in the world,  
and directing the things in the universe to his appointed end for them.

**Providence as \_\_\_\_\_:**

God keeps all things existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them.

### **Hebrews 1:3a (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he **upholds the universe by the word of his power.***

### **Colossians 1:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> *And he is before all things, and **in him all things hold together.***

### **Acts 17:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> *'In him we live and move and have our being' ...*

### **Nehemiah 9:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> *"You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and **you preserve all of them;** and the host of heaven worships you.*

God's providence is the basis of ...

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Providence as \_\_\_\_\_:

God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.

**Ephesians 1:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who **works all things according to the counsel of his will** ...*

Inanimate creation:

**Job 37:6-13 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> *For to the snow he says, 'Fall on the earth,' likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour. <sup>7</sup> He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom he made may know it. <sup>8</sup> Then the beasts go into their lairs, and remain in their dens. <sup>9</sup> From its chamber comes the whirlwind, and cold from the scattering winds. <sup>10</sup> By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast. <sup>11</sup> He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning. <sup>12</sup> They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. <sup>13</sup> Whether for correction or for his land or for love, **he causes it to happen.***

Events fully caused by God *and* fully caused by the creature:

Animals:

**Psalms 104:27-29 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> *These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. <sup>28</sup> When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. <sup>29</sup> When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.*

**Matthew 6:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> *Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*

Seemingly “random” or “chance” events:

**Proverbs 16:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*

The affairs of nations:

**Job 12:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> *He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away.*

**Psalms 22:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> *For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.*

**Acts 17:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> *And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,*

All aspects of our lives:

Daily dependence:

**Matthew 6:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread ...

All the days of our lives:

**Psalms 139:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

**Job 14:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> ... his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass

All our actions:

**Acts 17:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> for "In him we live and move and have our being"

**Jeremiah 10:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

**Proverbs 20:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> A man's steps are from the LORD; how then can man understand his way?

**Psalms 75:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up, <sup>7</sup> but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.

**1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

**Psalms 33:13-15 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; <sup>14</sup> from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, <sup>15</sup> he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.

**Philippians 2:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> ... for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

A caution:

*One approach to these passages about God's concurrence is to say that if our choices are real, they cannot be caused by God. But the number of passages that affirm this providential control of God is so considerable, and the difficulties involved in giving them some other interpretation are so formidable, that it does not seem to me that this can be the right approach to them. It seems better simply to affirm that God causes all things that happen, but that he does so in such a way that he somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices, choices that have real and eternal results, and for which we are held accountable. Exactly how God combines his providential control with our willing and significant choices, Scripture simply does not explain to us. But rather than deny one aspect of the other (simply because we cannot explain how both can be true), we should accept both in an attempt to be faithful to the teaching of all of Scripture.*

What about \_\_\_\_\_?

4 examples:

**Joseph:**

**Genesis 37:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> And his brothers were **jealous of him** ...

**Genesis 37:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they **hated him** and could not speak peacefully to him.

**Genesis 37:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they **hated him even more**.

**Genesis 37:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So, **they hated him even more** for his dreams and for his words.

**Genesis 37:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Come now, **let us kill him** and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."

**Genesis 37:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> And they took him and **threw him into a pit**. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

**Genesis 37:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and **sold him to the Ishmaelite's** for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

And yet ...

**Genesis 45:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for **God sent me** before you to preserve life.

**Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> As for you, **you meant evil** against me, **but God meant it for good**, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

What does this teach us?

**Pharaoh of the Exodus:**

**Exodus 4:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. **But I will harden his heart**, so that he will not let the people go.

**Exodus 7:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> **But I will harden Pharaoh's heart**, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt,

**Exodus 9:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> **But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh**, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

But wait ...

**Exodus 8:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, **he hardened his heart** and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

**Exodus 8:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> **But Pharaoh hardened his heart** this time also, and did not let the people go.

What does this teach us?

**Romans 9:17-18 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." <sup>18</sup> So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

**Job:**

**Job 1:12-19 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So, Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

<sup>15</sup> and **the Sabeans fell upon them** and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

<sup>17</sup> While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "**The Chaldeans** formed three groups and **made a raid** on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

<sup>19</sup> and behold, **a great wind came** across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

But Job said,

**Job 1:21-22 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. **The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away**; blessed be the name of the LORD." <sup>22</sup> In all this **Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.**

What do we learn from this?

**Jesus:**

**Acts 2:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> **this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.**

**Acts 4:27-28 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> ... for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do **whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.**

**Some conclusions:**

- God uses ALL THINGS to fulfill His purposes and even uses EVIL for His GLORY and our GOOD.
- God NEVER does evil and is never to be BLAMED for it.
- God rightfully JUDGES moral creatures for the evil they do. (Isa 66:3-4)
- Evil is REAL and ALWAYS harms us and others.
- We can affirm these statements to be true because SCRIPTURE TEACHES THEM, even if we do not understand it.

What do you mean by “free”?

*Agents may properly be said to be free so long as their acts are uncoerced. People are free to act within the confines of their nature. Since all men are fallen in Adam, their nature is corrupted by sin, and they are therefore not free to choose righteousness. Nevertheless, they still freely make their moral choices according to their thinking and desires. Those choices arise from a fallen human nature, which is fundamentally opposed to obeying God. So, people act freely in their sin and are not coerced by God to act against their nature. God’s decree extends to the uncoerced choices of agents free to act within the bounds of their nature (cf., e.g., Gen. 50: 19– 20; Acts 2: 23; 4: 27– 28).*

- John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*

More than **knowing** ...

God doesn’t “decree” because he knows the future. He knows the future because he decreed it. Scripture emphatically and repeatedly emphasizes God’s ACTIONS in Providence, not merely his KNOWLEDGE.

The “openness” of God?

Some final thoughts ...

- 1) We can’t \_\_\_\_\_ it all. We aren’t meant to. We are meant to \_\_\_\_\_ Him.
- 2) God ordains both the \_\_\_\_\_ as well as the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3) We are \_\_\_\_\_ ... sort of.
- 4) We are \_\_\_\_\_ ... completely.
- 5) We can be \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ that God says – past, present, future.
- 6) We can rest \_\_\_\_\_ in Him.
- 7) A right understanding of God’s providence leads to \_\_\_\_\_.