

Problems of God's Providence

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

- [0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to 2 Kings 19. 2 Kings 19. We're going to see a story of Sennacherib, the powerful king of Assyria, who sent Israel's king Hezekiah a letter.
- 2 Kings 19. And now God has chosen to send you and me a letter and tell us about this amazing event.
- 2 Kings 19. We'll begin reading at verse 14. Verse 14. Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it.
- Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth.
- You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear. Open your eyes, O Lord, and see.
- [1 : 22] Listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their land.
- They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods, but only wood and stone fashioned by men's hands. Now, O Lord, our God, deliver us from His hand so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, our God.
- Then Isaiah, son of Amos, sent a messenger to Hezekiah. This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib, king of Assyria.
- This is the word of the Lord. This is the word that the Lord has spoken against him. The virgin daughter of Zion despises you and mocks you.
- The daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee. Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride?
- [2 : 42] Against the Holy One of Israel. By your messengers, you have heaped insults on the Lord. And you have said, With my many chariots, I have ascended to the heights of the mountains, the utmost heights of Lebanon.
- I have cut down its tallest cedars, the choicest of its pines. I have reached its remotest parts, the finest of its forest. I have dug wells in foreign lands and drunk the water there.
- With the soles of my feet, I have dried up all the streams of Egypt. Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it.
- In the days of old I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone. Their people, drained of power, are dismayed and put to shame.
- They are like plants in the field, like tender green shoots, like grass sprouting on the housetops, scorched before it grows up.
- [3 : 52] But I know where you stay and when you come and go and how you rage against me. Because you rage against me and your insolence has reached my ears, I have put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth.
- And I will make you return by the way you came. This will be a sign for you, O Hezekiah. This year you will eat what grows by itself and the second year what springs from that.

But in the third year, sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Once more, a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above.

For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Therefore, this is what the Lord says concerning the king of Assyria. He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it.

[5 : 12] By the way that he came, he will return. He will not enter this city, declares the Lord. I will defend this city and save it for my sake and for the sake of David, my servant.

That night, the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp.

When the people got up the next morning, there were all the dead bodies. So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, broke camp and withdrew.

He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god, Nisroch, his sons, Adrammelech and Sherezar, cut him down with the sword and they escaped to the land of Ararat.

And Aserhaddon, his son, succeeded him as king. Well, are you learning to see the hand of God's providence in your everyday life?

[6 : 28] Things big, things small. That's the biblical worldview, isn't it? That's the true interpretation of reality of what's happening to you and around you in the world you inhabit.

It's that God upholds and controls all his creatures in all their actions all the time. Say that with me. God upholds and controls all his creatures in all their actions all the time.

Having seen this definition of the providence of God supported by Scripture, we then considered some problems with God's providence. Some problems by which I meant man's problems with God's providence.

God has no problem controlling all his creatures and all their actions all the time. But most of man's problems with God's providence are due to the mystery of God's providence.

That God does move in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. It's often due to the hiddenness of God that we can't see God and he's nowhere to be found and we don't understand what he's doing.

[7 : 48] He hides himself behind second causes, behind King Cyrus, for instance. And Sennacherib, he hides behind delays and frowning providences.

All you see is that difficult person in your life and that disease, that storm, but you fail to see God's hand. But he's there. He's hiding behind losses that are really gains, behind trials that are really just blessings in disguise, behind higher wisdom, impossibilities, which are really just opportunities to learn more that nothing is too hard for God.

So he's a God as Isaiah says, truly you are a God who hides yourself. And so much of man's problem with God's providence has to do with this mysterious aspect of it.

Now it's only human to want to understand God's purposes and plans, but it is sinful human pride to demand that we understand God's purposes and plans for all that he does.

The truth of God's providence comes with a warning. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense. Beware of shrinking God down to the size so that your little mind can understand him.

[9 : 24] His ways are far beyond you and his thoughts beyond man's thoughts. And to lean on your own understanding here is to be sure to fail.

So remember, when we come to the providence of God, we not only accept mystery, we expect it.

We expect it as par for the course, for the infinite always boggles the mind of the finite. So we must be content to live with mystery, indeed to live with our mysterious God.

So today we're going to look at two more problems with God's providence. The first was more practical, this is more theoretical, but it's nonetheless problems that people have with God's providence.

And it's number one is the problem of God's involvement with man's heart, man's mind and affections and will, that God's messing around inside there in the hearts of men to accomplish his will.

[10 : 30] That's the problem. How can God act upon and influence the heart of man in his decisions without violating or destroying his free agency and moral responsibility?

responsibility. Now this is just another page in the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. And usually what happens if we try to explain the mystery away, one or the other suffers.

Either God's sovereignty is diminished or denied or man's responsibility is diminished or denied. We need to learn to live with the tension, the mystery of it.

So in providence, God rules over everything, causing things to happen according to his decree and in bringing his plan to pass, God turns men's hearts and minds, he hardens hearts, he influences thoughts and actions and choices, indeed controlling all things that happen so that it indeed fulfills exactly what he purposed in eternity past.

Yet, man is responsible for his every sinful thought and desire and choice and action and even in action. And in the day of judgment, every mouth will be silenced.

[11 : 48] No one will be saying, but God, I'm innocent. No one will be blaming God. He will have nothing to say to excuse himself. His own guilt will be clear and no one will be blaming God.

The fault, the responsibility will be clearly seen to be all his own. So we have both in scripture, don't we? God's sovereign providence and man's responsibility.

The Bible teaches that, but it doesn't explain how that operates. And therein is the mystery and the problem for some.

I want to show this morning that the Bible clearly teaches that God in providence does act upon the hearts and minds of people. people. He directs and changes people's minds.

We have that passage in Proverbs 21.1, the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. He directs it like a water course wherever he pleases. The pictures of the farmer irrigating his crop, how to get the water from the water and hole to the places where he's planted his crop.

[13 : 00] And so he digs an irrigation stream and he's able to go around trees and he's able to direct that water stream wherever he wants. And God says, that's the way it is with the king's heart.

I direct it wherever I want it to go. His thoughts, his desires, his choices, they're all in the Lord's hands so much that the result of what they decide is just what God had purposed.

That means both in China's oppressive laws against religion and our own freedoms in this land of religion.

In both, God's hand of providence is directing rulers to bring about just those purposes or those realities behind which lies God's purposes.

He does have a purpose for China, doesn't he? Even in this oppressive regime, he does have a purpose for America with our present freedoms and he's accomplishing his will.

[14 : 04] He directs and turns the hearts of leaders. So God is here claiming amazing control over people's hearts. Some say God can't be fiddling with men's hearts.

He can't be changing them. That would destroy all responsibility. Try telling that to Saul of Tarsus. He was breathing out slaughter against the Lord's church. And the Lord stepped in and changed his heart.

Didn't he? And by the time he gets done getting to Damascus where he was going to persecute and prison and arrest followers of Jesus, his heart has been so changed that he's doing the opposite.

He's preaching up the Christ that he once sought to destroy. We find the Lord opening Lydia's heart to respond favorably to the gospel message he heard.

We find God putting the same earnest care into the heart of Titus as Paul had for them. It's God who works in you both the willingness and the doing of his good pleasure.

[15 : 10] It does sound from scripture, doesn't it, that God is involved in people's hearts. God blinds and hardens people's hearts. Ten times the Bible says in Exodus that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Exodus 421, the Lord said, I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. And sure enough, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen just as the Lord had said.

And after God made Pharaoh willing to let them go, ten plagues later, God says, I will now harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them.

And that's what happened. He chased them to the Red Sea. And then God said, God had said, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them.

And that's exactly what they did so that God could bury them there in the Red Sea. God was working upon the hearts of Pharaoh, his soldiers, his chariot drivers, hardening their hearts so that they would end up dead.

[16 : 26] About 40 years later, when Israel has made their way through the wilderness and they're entering, close to entering the promised land, Israel asked to pass through the land of Heshbon.

Deuteronomy 2.30, Moses is recounting this to the Israelites, but he says, remember Sihon, king of Heshbon, refused to let us pass through. That's strange.

Why? For the Lord your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands as he now has done. God made his spirit stubborn.

God made his heart obstinate to fulfill his divine purpose of handing him over in battle to Israel. Now, how did God do that without violating Sihon's own will?

Without removing his responsibility? I don't know. We're not told, but he did it, didn't he? Romans 8, 11, 7, and 8.

[17 : 29] What then? What Israel sought so earnestly, that is salvation, it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened.

As it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see, ears so they could not hear. to this very day. Revelation 7 speaks of ten kings who at the end of times would give their power and authority to the beast and will make war against the lamb and his chosen, called, and faithful followers.

Why would these kings give their power over to the beast? Well, verse 17 says, because God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule until God's words are fulfilled.

How did God, how's God going to put that into the hearts of kings? I have no clue, but he's going to do it. Exodus 34 talks about three times a year God required all the men to appear before him in Jerusalem at the feast.

This would be a real test of faith because it would leave all their possessions very vulnerable to the surrounding peoples and yet God made a promise. No one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord your God.

[18 : 49] Evidently, God has control over men's covetous hearts and he can keep them from coveting, at least during those three times. How did he do that?

I don't know. When the Israelites were fleeing Egypt in the night, they asked the Egyptians for silver, gold, and clothing as Moses had instructed them to do and the Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people and they gave them what they asked for so they plundered the Egyptians.

That's no small thing to do. People like their stuff, don't they? They don't hand over gold and silver and possessions and food to their enemies and yet that's exactly what God did.

He made their hearts favorably disposed to do those kinds of things. Daniel 1.8, God caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel.

God worked on his affection so that he liked Daniel. Now, God uses means. I'm not saying he doesn't, but he doesn't always explain how does he do that. Whatever the second causes, God was active.

[19 : 59] God was in it, wasn't he? That's what the Bible's telling us anyway. So clearly, the Bible tells us that in his providence, God is involved, the very workings of men's hearts, acting upon them to bring to pass what he's planned and yet he does it in such a way that he deals with moral agents as moral agents.

He deals differently with the lightning than he does Sihon, the king. And yet he's actively involved in working in his heart without violating his freedom and his responsibility for his ultimate decision.

Now, that's problem number one, the problem of God working in people's hearts. The second problem is closely aligned with it and it's the problem of God's involvement with evil.

God upholds and controls all his creatures. Does that include sinful people? Well, yes, they're part of all his creatures.

In all their actions, does that include their sinful actions? Their evil actions? Yes, that's all their actions. And yet he does not tempt men, nor does he remove their responsibility for their sin.

[21 : 13] James 1, 13 and 14. When tempted, no one should say, God's tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil. Neither does he tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when by his own evil desires he is dragged away and enticed.

So God doesn't tempt people to sin. He never forces people to sin. They always sin willingly, just as you do and I do.

We have our reasons for doing it, whether we understand them or not. God isn't forcing us. We sin because we choose to sin. People do evil because of their own evil desires.

And that's why they and not God are responsible for their sins. So God governs and controls evil men and their sinful behavior.

But their sins come from themselves, not from God. He's not the author of sin, though he's clearly involved with sin. He plans it.

[22 : 17] He decrees it. He governs and controls it. He makes sure that it happens and he uses it to fulfill his plans. So he is involved with it. Yet, he carries out this control of sin and sinful people in perfect holiness.

Never himself partaking in their sins. For there is no darkness in him. No, none at all. It's a triple negative. There is no, not a smidgen of evil in God.

He's perfect light and goodness and holiness. So he never sins or becomes defiled by his involvement with sin.

Though he uses sin, he never gets his hands dirty. How do you handle a bicycle chain without getting your hands dirty in the process?

Last week I was riding in about a mile from my house and my chain broke. And before it was all over, the grease had won. How can God handle something as dirty and evil as sin without getting his hands dirty in the process?

[23 : 35] Without doing evil? Without partaking of the evil? Without in any way acting contrary to perfect holiness and goodness? Without partaking in men's sins or becoming responsible for sin without forcing men to sin against their will, removing their responsibility?

That's one of his secrets. It's one of the secrets of his providence. But that he does it is clear from scripture. And I want to set that before you next.

We see we've seen how God is active in people's hearts. Now I want you to see how God is involved in sinners and sins. with those caveats that not ever becoming sinful himself, not ever sinning himself or tempting men to sin, being the author of their sin.

But a couple texts and then many examples. Proverbs 16.4 The Lord works out everything for his own ends, even the wicked for the day of disaster. So the Lord has purposes for everything and he's working out those purposes.

He's even got purposes for the wicked. purposes for a day of disaster. Romans 9.17 scripture says to Pharaoh, I raised you up for this very purpose that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

[24 : 56] It's to the praise of God's great wisdom and power that he can turn the greatest evils of wicked men to the greatest good of his own glory. He makes even the wrath of men to praise him.

And the remainder he restrains. Now the Bible gives us many examples of God's using sin to fulfill his plans. Of his control over sinful people and their sinful acts.

Exhibit number one would have to be the crucifixion of the Son of God by which our salvation was procured. Was it planned? Or did it just take God by surprise?

Well, the Bible says it was planned. And if planned, then God planned for evil to be involved, didn't he? It included the immoral acts of Judas and of those the Sanhedrin, those Jewish religious leaders and Pilate and the crowd and the soldiers.

And he didn't just leave that plan with them in it just by chance maybe to happen. No, he saw to it that it happened just as he had planned since nothing happens outside of God's providence.

[26 : 11] So he used evil to fulfill his purpose to save his people by the sacrifice of his son. So just consider Judas and his evil action of betraying the innocent Lord Jesus.

At the Last Supper, Jesus says to his disciples in the upper room, the Son of Man, that's a reference to himself, the Son of Man will go just as it has been decreed.

But woe to that man who betrays him. It would have been better for him if he had never been born. Notice two things.

Judas' betrayal was decreed by God. The Son of Man will go just as it has been decreed. Truth number two, Judas was fully responsible.

Woe to that man by whom he will be betrayed. It would be better for him not to have been born. Now how do you put those two together? I don't know. It's a mystery.

[27 : 14] But that it happened is told us in Scripture. God decreed it. God governed it so that it happened. Yet Judas is entirely responsible and guilty for betraying the Savior.

He wasn't forced against his will. He had reasons for betraying Jesus. His love of money, his hatred of Christ. He acted most willingly and voluntarily. And so he went to where he belongs, Acts tells us.

Then consider the involvement of the Jews and the Gentiles as they too were working together to do away with Jesus. That was evil. And as the church got together and prayed in the book of Acts after this has all happened in Jerusalem and now they're being persecuted, they see in the opposition to Christ the fulfillment of Psalm 2.

And they pray and they say to the Sovereign Lord, indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and with the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed.

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. What did they do? They falsely accused him.

[28 : 28] They condemned him to death. They lied about him. They spit on him. They mocked him and beat him and finally nailed him to the cross.

And in all that they wickedly did to Jesus, they only did what God's power and will had decided beforehand should happen. So God decided it, decreed it and brought it to, made sure it happened according to his plan.

And yet Pilate and King Herod and the Jews and the Gentiles are charged with the death of the Son of God.

You put to death the Lord of glory, the Messiah, and so they were responsible for their wicked actions that they so willingly did.

The Jewish leaders out of envy for Jesus' popularity and out of hatred for the way that he exposed them. Woe to the Pharisees, he'd say, the leaders, the scribes and Pharisees.

[29 : 41] They hated him. They wanted him dead. Pilate, he too had his reasons wanting to please the people above doing what was right. So God in Providence uses the wicked acts of sinful men to bring about his righteous purpose.

Even your salvation and mine. Marvelous, isn't it? Strange, isn't it? Mysterious. So God in Providence does use sin and sinners to bring about holy and good and righteous purposes.

And he does it all in such a way that his hands are not dirtied with sin, not contaminated by evil or defiled by it in any way.

You remember when Job had everything taken from him, his response was, the Lord gave and the Lord no. Did he say the Lord gave and those nasty Sabeans that made off with my oxen and donkeys and those covetous Chaldeans made off with my camels?

He didn't say that. It would have been true. But instead he said the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. And how did he take away?

[31 : 02] Well, through those thieving Sabeans and Chaldeans their wicked acts. That's how the Lord but he doesn't miss the hand of providence and that's what he's saying.

And in all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. Now if God had nothing at all to do with the thievery of his camels and oxen and donkeys then Job would be guilty of charging God with wrongdoing.

He said the Lord is taken away and God would say no I didn't have anything to do with it. Why are you lying about me? No, no he wasn't lying when he said the Lord is taken away because God in providence used the Sabeans and the Chaldeans to take away his wealth because God had a holy purpose.

It was mysterious to Job. It was hidden. It was secret but he had his purposes for doing so didn't he? The wrongdoing belonged entirely to the Sabeans and Chaldeans not God who used them.

They had the reasons. They liked the looks of those donkeys and camels. They wanted them for themselves. In Habakkuk chapter 1 in order to judge and apostate Israel, the whole nation, they turned their back on God, the Lord says, I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless impetuous people who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their home.

- [32 : 26] Think of your home. it's going to be seized by these ruthless impetuous people, a feared and dreaded people who are a law to themselves. They come bent on violence, guilty men whose own strength is their God.

Now that's not a clean vessel that God used, but he used it. He says, I'm raising them up to do this work of judgment on Israel.

But they acted out of their own sinful evil desires of greed and pride and violence in coming and wreaking havoc upon Israel as they did.

And then God brings the pagan Persian Cyrus that we heard of in the worship time. He brings the pagan king Cyrus to judge the Babylonians for what they have done to Israel.

So the Babylonians were used to punish Israel, but they did it out of the lust and evil in their hearts. So God brings Cyrus and brings him, the Persians to judge the Babylonians from the east.

- [33 : 31] I summon a bird of prey from a far off land. This man to fulfill my purpose. What was the purpose? To punish Babylon for their sins. And what I have said, that will I bring about.

I'm going to do this, he's saying. What I have planned, that will I do. A bird of prey, that's not a songbird to chirp in the tree. A bird of prey is coming to devour and that's what God is summoning this wicked king and his soldiers to come and to do to Babylon.

To judge Babylon and set Israel free. Scripture calls these wicked leaders and nations the rod, the staff, the axe, the saw, in his hand, in God's hand.

They're the axe, but they're in God's hand. They're moved by him, even as instruments are moved by the hand of the user.

God has got a hold of Cyrus and he's raising him up and he's, even in chapter 46 of Isaiah, this is what the Lord says to his anointed Cyrus, whose right hand he takes hold of to subdue nations before him.

- [34 : 42] Come on, come on, Cyrus, I've got work for you. He's got him by the hand. Don't tell me God doesn't have anything to do with sinful men and what they do. He's got him by the right hand. He's got a hold of his axe.

He's wielding it. He's doing something through these wicked servants and yet God is not partaking in sin. It all belongs to Cyrus.

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, he had it read for us. He's got a string of undefeated battles. It's been going on for years and years and decades and he's boasting about it.

I've ascended the heights. I've cut down the tallest seed. I've reached the remotest parts. I've dug wells in foreign lands. He's boasting of all of his military accomplishments and victories and then God just pops his balloon with one poke.

Let's all the air out of his proud boast just by pointing out that it was God's own providential involvement that was behind these victories. For God says, have you not heard?

- [35 : 53] Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it and now I have brought it to pass that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone and so on. I have done this.

I have done this as an actor. Haven't you heard? I planned that long ago and now I have brought it to pass. Oh, so I guess God had something to do with it.

That's what he's telling. Wicked Sennachera. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2 that when the lawless one comes at the end of time, it will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders.

Beware of signs and wonders and miracles. We're being told that that's how the lawless one will come. And in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing, they perish because they refuse to love the truth and so to be saved.

For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

[37 : 05] The gospel came. They didn't receive it in the love of it. They loved their wickedness so they rejected the gospel. Therefore, God will send a powerful delusion so they will believe the lie, they'll follow the man of sin, and they will be destroyed.

God's involved, you see. I'll send a powerful delusion that they believe the lie. Now, we could just go on and on, multiplying examples, but I want to close with some applications.

I trust by now that we see that the Bible leaves no question as to what God does in providence. He does exercise complete, perfect control over all his creatures, sinful ones included, perfect control over all their actions, sinful ones not accepted.

That much is undeniably clear. He claims it for himself. as is the fact that God does not tempt anyone, cannot lie, cannot sin, hates sin, and is not the author of it.

But how God does all of this is not explained in Scripture. How he uses sin and sinners and is involved with the whole mess without getting his hands dirty is not revealed.

[38 : 34] It's one of those secret things that belong to the Lord our God. And the first application is submit your mind to Scripture. Submit your mind to Scripture.

What's your posture towards this book? Do you stand in judgment over it and say, you know, I'm not going to swallow that unless I can understand it?

Well, you'll never. You'll never swallow the providence of God, the biblical doctrine of the providence of God, because you'll never understand that. It's mystery. It's a secret. God's not revealed it.

You know, even national governments have secrets, don't they? Top secret. A lot of it has to do with how they handle their enemies. And should God, the king of all the universe, not have some top secrets that he's not revealed about how he handles his enemies?

His wicked ones that he wants to bring judgment upon? God, it's secret. It's not revealed. So this doctrine will expose your heart.

[39 : 40] What's your attitude toward God's word? It's your attitude toward God. The two are always together. Will you submit to what God has clearly said, even though you don't understand how both of these things can be true?

God deals with sinners, is involved in bringing his will to pass through sinners, uses sin to accomplish his will, and yet is not responsible for it?

Or will you bow? Or will you proudly say, no, I must understand. Oh, we must come before this doctrine and bow before the mystery.

Bow before the mysterious God. God. Our belief in what God's word says does not depend on our comprehending all that it says, but rather just in the fact that God has said it.

Isn't that simple? The youngest Christian here, the five-year-old believer in Jesus, say, I don't understand all that, but I believe it if it's in the Bible.

[40 : 53] Isn't that wonderful? And there's more faith in a five-year-old believer who does that than the seminary prof who says, it doesn't fit my mind.

I don't buy that. Well, they've not submitted to God as king. They've not submitted to his word. God says it, I believe it.

Does that settle it for you? It's one of the marks of a true believer. Their minds have once at enmity with God have now submitted to God.

And they submit to his word. His word trumps all of their other questions. Has God said it? Then I believe it.

I'll wait to understand more of it. I hope I understand more and more of it here in this life and later in heaven even much more. But if you don't believe the word of God, I mean, how do you understand the gospel?

[41 : 52] You understand everything about the gospel, how the blood of Jesus flowing down from a cross over in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago will change your destiny from hell to heaven forever. Do you understand all of that and exactly how that works?

I don't. I understand a lot of it that's been revealed, but there's a lot that hasn't been revealed, and yet I believe it because his word tells me of it, and I taste his salvation.

But you see, if I wait till I understand everything before I jump in and believe this God who's revealed himself, then I'll never be saved. Some of you are waiting. What are you waiting for?

You're waiting for God to explain all the mysteries? No, no. Come to Christ. He's a wonderful Savior. His gospel promises are true, and he will save you.

He's willing and ready to save you. So this problem of knowing how God's providence works, that's God's business. It's really not ours, is it? He's doing just fine. He's been doing it for thousands of years, and we must be content to take what he has revealed.

[43 : 00] Secret things belong to the Lord our God. The things revealed belong to us and our children. To obey them, to believe them, to trust them. Some would try to explain away the mystery of God's providence by saying that God just permits sinners.

to sin. See, that solves it all. He doesn't get involved with sin. It's a hands-off policy. He just doesn't stop it. He sees it's going to happen, and he doesn't do anything to stop it.

So it's all passive. It's merely let sinners do their thing. Now that might sound appealing at first, but it simply doesn't square with scripture. God's involvement with sinners, as we've seen, is more than a passive thing of standing back and just doing nothing.

Now it is true that Satan and evil men can do nothing without God's permission. No one can touch you without God's permission, child of God. But the Bible says God's involvement with sin and evil goes beyond bare permission.

It says that he decrees it, plans it, purposes, brings it to pass. He uses sin and sinners as a man uses an axe or a hammer. He takes hold of the right hand of the wicked one and brings him into the fray.

[44 : 14] He raises up and summons wicked kings to do his work, which included evil deeds. He uses thieves and raiding bands to take away possessions from people like Job. He influences minds and desires.

He directs steps. He puts it into the hearts of men to do what he's planned. He hardens hearts, makes them obstinate, blind, sends a powerful delusion to believe a lie.

He gives men over to the power of sin and temptation. He withdraws and withholds grace. This and many other things show us that it's more than bare permission, God's involvement.

He doesn't just stand back and do nothing and just let it happen. But never to the violating of his own holiness or man's free agency. And so we agree with the 1689 Confession of Faith, chapter 5, Providence of God, paragraph 4.

Both the fall of the first man into sin and all other sinful actions of angels and men proceed according to God's sovereign purposes. It's not that God gives us bare permission, for in a variety of ways he wisely and powerfully limits, orders, and governs sinful actions so that they do affect his holy designs.

- [45 : 24] Yet the sinfulness involved in the actions proceeds only from men and not from God, who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author approver or approver of sin.

Second application. First, submit to what God's word says, even when you don't understand all about it. Second is worship and endure. Worship and adore and praise your mysterious God.

Aren't you glad that God is bigger than what your mind can comprehend? He's to be praised for that. He's to be worshiped for that. Our awesome, magnificent, majestic, mysterious God who is like him.

And he's our God. He's for us. Aren't you glad that he's so in control of sin and sinners that he's planning and preparing an eternity for his people without sin and sinners?

The home of righteousness. And then lastly, rest in his providence. Worship and adore and then rest in it.

- [46 : 38] Isn't this a God to rest in? The God has got it. The whole thing. He's got it. The sin. This unjust treatment I'm getting.

You know, you can't live in this world and not have sinful men splash their sins on you. It happens in your own home. How much more when you go to work, when you get out into society.

You're among unbelievers. It happens in the church. So what do you do with that? Well, Job bowed and worshipped.

You know, the Sabaeans and Chaldeans are still in the land. They still sin against you, just as they did Job. Job bowed and worshipped.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. He's not done anything wrong. He's to be praised. He's got a purpose. I don't have a clue what it is, but he's to be praised. You know why he could say that?

- [47 : 38] Because he believed in the providence of God. He believed that God's hand was behind it all. He saw God in his life. That's why I wonder, are you learning to see God? Not just in those God moments, as people say.

They're all God moments. It's always a God thing. God is always controlling all his creatures, all their actions, all the time.

And it's as we realize this has come from my loving, all-wise, powerful Father, that I can worship him, rest in him, trust him.

Spurgeon said, I could not bear it if I thought that even one of my trials was not tailor-made for me by God. Our trials are heavy enough, but don't make them heavier by not seeing that they come from your loving Father's hand.

That's it. God gives us this doctrine, not for us just to sit here and scratch our heads, but to cause us to rest. He's got it. He's sovereign over the whole mess.

- [48 : 47] And it is a mess, but he's not finished yet. And when he's finished, oh, how we will praise him, how we will worship and adore him, how we will rest in him for all eternity, with nothing to cause us fear.

Oh, it's a blessing to be in Christ, isn't it? If you're not in Christ today, come to him. He'll save you before you walk out of those doors. He's just that good.

He's just that kind. Let's pray. Thank you for the revealed things, our Father. We will leave to you those secrets and hidden things, the mysterious things.

we're just thankful that they're not mysterious to you. They're not hidden to you. You know things through and through. You know exactly what you're doing. And we're also very thankful that not everything is so mysterious that we don't understand anything.

We thank you that we have the gospel. We have it explained to us so that we know how us poor sinners could be right with a holy God, could have our destination changed from hell to heaven forever.

[49 : 59] Thank you for Jesus and the revelation of the gospel, not just to our minds, but to open our hearts to receive the truth and the love of it. Thank you that you've not hardened our hearts and made us obstinate.

That's what we deserved. Thank you for softening and warming and opening our hearts to receive your gospel. Do it for someone else here this morning that all might return home rejoicing in this great God being their God.

through Jesus Christ, we pray in his name. Amen.