

Providence in Conversion

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 April 2013

Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Well, last week we considered some of the very first acts of providence that God works in our lives. Remember what they were? His creation of us, His forminess and protecting us in the womb.

Fearfully and wonderfully made. And so this week, God was working together all 75 trillion cells in your body to bring you health, to be able to be here today.

God working, you see. And He began that work when He formed you in the womb and protected you there. And then His providence was seen in the time and place of your birth.

We were born in this century, at this date, in this country, in this place. And then thirdly, in the very families that we were born into. These were some of the earliest providences of God in our lives.

Fruitful fields where we find many reasons to give thanks to God for His mercies to us. Now this week, as we announced, we're studying God's providence in conversion.

[1:20] In conversion. Conversion is a turning to God. So the idea of conversion is we were all going our own way and God converted us. He turned us and brought us to Christ.

And so we're thinking about the way God did that. Flavel says, In nothing does providence shine forth more gloriously in this world than in ordering the circumstances, the instruments and means of converting His people.

So however skillfully God may have formed you in the womb and protected you and blessed you in the time and place and family of your birth, if He had not also ordered some means for your conversion, then all the former benefits He had done for you would be of little consequence.

For you would have lived and died and gone to hell. So Flavel is saying we need to appreciate not just that God created us, but that God worked in providence, events, circumstances, people in our lives to bring us to Christ.

And without this providence, all earlier ones, indeed even later ones, would have been of lesser value. So there's no higher benefit, Flavel's arguing, than God's providence in conversion.

[2:47] We ought to love to think about it. We ought to love to talk about it. The psalmist says, Great are the works of the Lord. They are pondered by all who delight in them.

And none more great than the providences of God in bringing you to faith in Jesus Christ. Now some will have clearer memories of the time and place of their conversion.

And Flavel wants to be sure that none are stumbled over this. Especially if you were raised in a Christian home and converted very early on, you may not remember the time and place, exact time and place of your conversion.

But remember, it was no small providence that placed you in that Christian home, where you had such early influences directing you to Christ.

Now, last week I gave you that assignment then to be thinking, what were some of the instruments, the timing, the places of God moving things in your life to bring you to conversion to Christ?

[3:55] Anybody like to share something of those providences this morning? There. I was reading the book Little Women. And in that story, Amy had her own personal quiet time in God.

I was about nine or ten. And God just really used that book to stir me to start reading the Bible. I set up a little worship in my closet.

And read hymns. What a friend we have is Jesus. And read the Word. And I really used it. Okay. Did you hear that in the back? Just the reading of Little Women and the idea of, even as a young girl, having her own time of reading the Scriptures.

And the Lord used that in her life. Was it Becky? Jim was working at a baby at a shack. And by the Providence, he needed to hire another worker.

And he was the manager who was hired. He went to church. And he was a man who needed a job. He was a pastor. And he hired him.

[5:07] And he hired him. And he worked in terms of God such as church. And just through his genuine life. Amen. Yes.

Rhonda. Several things in that testimony, not just the use of a man, Pastor Bob, but the loss of a loved one.

Preparing Rhonda's heart and having it tenderized than to receive the word that was brought.

Good. God's ordering of events, doing things around us to bring us.

Mark? The Lord worked in my parents' hearts to convict them that they were attending the wrong church. And they felt they weren't hearing the scriptures explain the way they were when they were children.

And so they began attending the Baptist church. And they felt my brother in the air and sent us the summer camp for that church. And that's what we call us.

[6:30] Amen. Amen. Anybody else? What did God use? What were the instruments? Circumstances?

Jim? Well, Pastor, this might be a little drawing up. I'll try to make it as short as possible. I remember growing up, Mom made an effort. Mom basically raised us kids of her own.

And she tried to make an effort for us kids to go to a church. I remember attending a basement church in Lakeville. I knew the Lord, but I didn't know the Lord, if that makes sense. I remember going to church.

And I always believed He existed, but that's as far as I let it go. And in later life, I was put in a position where I couldn't run. I was spaced with what I'd done. And the Lord led me into sinners further than to ask for forgiveness.

And I remember that day. It's like an afternoon yesterday, Pastor. It's like the weight of the world that lifts off my shoulders. And He brought good Christian people into my life. Amen. He brought me to this church. I remember when you come over and visit with me.

[7:28] I remember when Phil Manley would come over and visit with me. Other groups would come in and visit on Wednesday nights and on Sunday and stuff like that. So, yes. Amen. It was the Lord doing it. He put me in a place where I couldn't run and show me.

What my sin got me into? Again, God preparing us to see our sin. Because unless we see our sin, we can't be saved.

We've got to know we're lost in order to look to the Savior to save us from our sin. Okay? Anyone else? Yes, Dale.

Growing up on the farm, we had a religious family that God was not a part of our lives. Our family. We went to church every Sunday. But, again, God was not really...

I didn't learn a lot of God at church. But it was instilled. That's what I did on Sunday. I can remember just, you know, doing field work.

[8:30] And just sensing God and my thoughts going to God. But it wasn't...

And once I got into the service, I knew I should be going to chapel. I should be going to church. And so that was a consistent thing. And through a church, then the gospel presented to me and saved me.

Amen. So an early habit established in his life. Paying dividends of conversion later on in his life. Yes, Dan.

I was saved as a young boy. So I think of my parents that taught me truth. Taught me to work with obedience. Taught me the difference between right and wrong.

I think of the blessing of having a conscience. Knowing in my heart when I did what was wrong. Parents that would help me do that. I wouldn't tolerate that.

[9:32] But I also think of those movies that our church had shown. They were produced in the 70s. It had some crazy music to it. I do remember that. But what I remember was the depiction of hell.

And the fact that it was permanent. And as a five or six year old boy, those people are there forever. That's what I think I used to. Okay. Very good.

Yes? Yes. Thinking of your teaching of the place, I guess probably here, because you were raised in a very, very, very young family. And the girl up the hill on this side went to a Catholic Christian church and the girl up the hill on this side and you were about to take a seat by the church where

you're at the gospel.

Amen. So just the place, the neighbors that Carol had were influential in bringing her to church where she heard the gospel and was saved.

Yes? Back in the late 60s, my uncle Alvin and Aunt Charlene bought this house on Plymouth Street. And in the early 70s, my sister and I would go there and we found out that they lived right across the alley from this family called Hees and had a truckload of kids.

[10:47] So we spent a lot of time playing with those kids. And in the mid-70s, my sister began attending their church community gospel and it influenced me to go there.

And I heard an evangelistic message by Pastor Bob and convicted me of my sin and brought me to Christ. Hmm. Okay. Again, relations, position, place, opportunity to hear the gospel that God then used to save you.

Billy? Billy? I just, my parents had always, as growing up, instructed us when we face difficult situations we should be beating. I remember just hearing over and over if you don't know how to make a decision to seek out wisdom to read these games and to pray about things and just that habit was put in our hearts and all the changes that I had come through because of that.

Hmm. Good. Again, that early habit of learning to turn to God's Word for answers and help. The greatest need for Christ.

Well, these are the, just a sampling. I trust that we, we think of them, that we share them with each other. Flavel has one point to make.

[12:13] Consider the strange ways that God crossed our paths with instruments of our conversion down to the minutest details of ordering the meeting of these two.

Us and the instruments that God would use to convert us. How does God bring these two things together? Well, we've just heard examples of how God brought those together.

Us and the means of conversion. Think of the Ethiopian eunuch. We talked about him last week, I believe, in the sermon, Acts chapter 8.

He's in charge of the treasury of his queen Candace in Ethiopia. So he's a long way from home. He's been to Jerusalem and now he's on his way back home. Now this is before the New Testament was written.

What does he have as his reading material? Not to kill time along the way home, but he's got a long journey. What's he reading? Isaiah. Now it's amazing that he even has a copy of Isaiah.

[13:18] It wasn't that you had your friendly Zondervan bookstore on every corner. That he would have a copy of Isaiah. Maybe he had more. We don't know. Where was he reading when Philip came alongside of him?

Pardon? In the chariot, right? Where in the scroll of Isaiah was he reading? Mark, you are good. So he's in... I know you. That's why it's so good. What is critical about Isaiah 53 that he was reading in that chapter?

It's talking about Jesus and his death upon the cross. It's at the very heart of the book of Isaiah. I mean, we've studied Isaiah.

I mean, if he was reading through some of those chapters about the wars going on, it may not have been that eye-opening to him. But he's reading in Isaiah 53 about the Lord's servant dying for the transgressions of his people.

[14:28] And precisely at that moment, he has this very equipped interpreter come alongside of him to explain to him who this servant of the Lord was.

Now, there's the Ethiopian. But how did God get the other half of the equation there? How did he get Philip there?

Well, Philip had been preaching the gospel and he was having revival wherever he went. People were turning to Christ. But the Holy Spirit said to Philip, I want you to leave the place of success and I want you to go out on the desert road.

And so he takes him out on the desert road and there he meets this Ethiopian. And the Spirit of God says, go join yourself to that chariot.

He runs alongside and the rest is history. As we said, he preached to him Jesus from Isaiah 53 and the man believed on Christ.

[15:33] He was baptized. He was converted. So the coming together of the two at the most precise instant when he's reading about the only Savior of sinners.

Then there's that Syrian Naaman in 2 Kings 5. He's the commander of the army of Syria. He's a valiant soldier. He's very esteemed by his king.

But he's a pagan. He's an idolater. He's worshiping false gods. He lives outside of Israel. It's no light of the knowledge of the true God other than what he's in creation and his heart suppresses.

How is God going to convert this heathen man outside of Israel? Well, he afflicts him with the dreaded disease of what? Leprosy. And then some of his raiding bands that he sends from Syria down into Israel kidnap a young girl and bring her back and present her to Naaman to be the servant of his wife.

Not some other servant but Naaman's servant. And she's a rare girl. Because she knew of God's power that accompanied the prophet Elisha in Samaria.

[16:59] You say, well, maybe everyone knew about the power to heal leprosy in Israel. No, Jesus says in Luke 4 that none of the many with leprosy in Israel had been cleansed in the time of Elisha the prophet.

God did not heal any Israelites with leprosy in the day of Elisha. But he heals this one Syrian. So this was not known throughout Israel that Elisha could heal leprosy.

It hadn't been done. And yet she knows this. She took pity on her captor and said to Naaman's wife, if only my master would see the prophet who's in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy.

That's amazing. How many young girls in Israel knew that? How many young girls in Israel would care to tell her captor that? That's the one that his men kidnapped.

Why? Maybe she was pretty. Who knows why they chose her? But in the providence of God, it was God's will to get her into Naaman's home and to tell him about the power of God through Elisha.

[18:20] Well, God used her. He also used some wise and compassionate servants who were attending him who would talk sense into him when he was ready to turn for home because he was put out by Elisha's directives to go wash seven times in the Jordan.

He had cleaner rivers back home and so he headed back angry. And it was his own servants that said, now if the prophet would have told you some hard thing to do, you would have done it.

He just tells you to dip in the dirty river and you won't do it. And they convince him. So do you see how God brings together a pagan man, Naaman, away from Israel in Syria and the message of the one and true God.

And he ends up being healed and becoming a worshiper of the one true God of Israel. Think of the Samaritan woman in John 4. How is this immoral Samaritan woman going to meet up with Jesus Christ and the living water that is in him?

Well, it's going to be by going to get water at the well of Sychar. She lives in Sychar. It's natural that she would go to the well outside of Sychar for water.

[19:41] That's where they all went. But she doesn't go in the cool of the morning. When most of the ladies would go to gather water. Why not? Because she's immoral.

And she no doubt was not appreciated by these other women. She was a woman of bad reputation, scorned by the women of Sychar as a marriage breaker.

So, she waits and she makes her way to the well at what time? 12 noon. About 12 noon. The heat of the day.

There would hardly be anybody there then. Nobody goes to gather water at noon. Well, meanwhile, Jesus is passing through Samaria to get to Galilee with his disciples.

And the scripture says he must needs go through Samaria. Now, their starting point that morning was critical. Wherever they had been traveling the day before and decided to stop was critical because from the point of where they started that morning to where they got at noon was established by where they quit the day before.

[20:55] So, at noon, they'd come to this well at Sychar. And Jesus is already exhausted from the journey. He sits down to rest. It's noon. The disciples go into town to get lunch.

And then she comes to draw water. And before it's all over, she's drinking the living water of eternal life from Jesus Christ. And she runs back into Sychar with her testimony.

He told me everything I ever did. And coming from her, that was enough to gather the whole town to come out to hear Jesus. And then many others believed on him.

Not just because of the word of the woman, but also because they heard him himself. This is the amazing providence of God bringing together Lord Jesus and this poor sinful woman at the well of Sychar.

Saving her, converting her, and then using her to save many others. The historian Lavater lived during the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland.

[22 : 07] And he tells of many Roman Catholic Spanish soldiers who were sent from Spain into Germany to fight.

and there they were converted to Christ by meeting godly ministers and Christians. Now, they didn't go to Germany to be converted.

They went there to murder the Protestant Germans. But it was while they were there that they came into contact with genuine Christianity, heard the gospel, and believed.

Amazing providence. Flavel tells of a Roman Catholic scholar named Vergerius who studied the German Protestant writings to refute them.

Well, that's dangerous, isn't it? You can already hear where this is going. We're going to study these German Reformed men just to slash them and bash them. Well, by reading their books, he was convinced of their biblical arguments and then convinced his own brother as well.

[23 : 12] And the two of them believed on the Lord and began to preach justification by the free grace of God through faith in Christ alone apart from the works of men.

The providence of God. How is God going to bring the true gospel to a man steeped in Romanism and the gospel of good works?

Well, he's going to have him try to bash the Protestants and so he'll have him read some of his writings. The conversion of Charles Spurgeon is amazing providences.

And in many ways, he grew up in a faithful book. He had godly parents, godly grandparents. And yet, though God no doubt used their influence as a 16-year-old Charles Spurgeon was lost in his own sin.

And God had another tailor-made instrument to catch this fish in his gospel net. Now, many of us, testimonies were given of the influence of parents and that's the way the Lord saved me.

[24 : 25] It was the influence of parents commending Christ to me from the very beginning right through my life in their lives and in their words. But God didn't choose to save Spurgeon just through the influence of parents.

No, he had another instrument that he would use to bring this fish into the gospel net. It was a very unlikely instrument. A very thin shoemaker or tailor who worshipped in a primitive Methodist chapel. Spurgeon said he didn't know much. He was a poor speaker. How would he become the instrument of salvation for Spurgeon? Well, it was a Sunday morning snowstorm that kept the regular minister from showing up at the primitive Methodist chapel.

And so this man just stood up to preach. So that's how God gets the instrument to the appointed place. Snowstorm keeps the regular minister out and the shoemaker stands up to preach.

But Spurgeon doesn't attend this church. He attends his own Baptist church. And besides that, he's not even anywhere near this town.

[25 : 37] He attends a boarding school as a 16-year-old over Newmarket. But the Lord afflicted the Newmarket school with a rage of fevers and they had to close the school down and send people home.

And so Spurgeon's home. Why is he home? Because the outbreak of the fever. But he still doesn't go to this primitive Methodist church. No, he goes to the Baptist church. So he's headed to the Baptist church.

But the snowstorm is so great that he can't go any further. So he just ducks in the alley and attends this primitive Methodist church. And he says this very ordinary man got up to preach on Isaiah 45-22.

Look to me and be saved all you ends of the earth. It was a very simple message. Spurgeon says he just kept repeating the text because he had very little else to say.

He just kept repeating. Look to me. Jesus is saying look to me. You don't have to be a college graduate to look to me. You don't have to. And on and on he went.

[26 : 42] Look to me, Jesus is saying. And he spun this on for about ten minutes. And then he spotted Spurgeon sitting below the gallery in the back. And he said, young man, you look very miserable.

And you will always be miserable. Miserable in life, miserable in death. If you don't obey my text, but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.

Look to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth. And then lifting up his hands, he shouted as only a primitive Methodist could.

Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look, look, look. You have nothing to do but look and live. And Spurgeon says, I at once saw the way of salvation clearly.

I know not what else he said. I did not take much notice of it. I was so possessed with that one thought. I had been waiting to do fifty things. But when I heard that word look, what a charming word it seemed to me.

[27 : 43] Oh, I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. He trusted in Christ and was forgiven and cried, I am forgiven, I am forgiven. a monument of grace, a sinner saved by blood.

So, how does God get the two together? His sinner, his elect sinner, and the gospel means that will save him. It was an outbreak of the fever, and it was a snowstorm, and there they are.

And please hear me, when we're talking about these works of promise, you realize there's more that has to be done to save someone. Spurgeon had heard the gospel from grandpa and daddy and mommy for 16 years and hadn't been saved.

No, God has to do more than just the work of getting people. He had to open Spurgeon's heart and eyes to appreciate this gospel message, and that's what he did that winter Sunday.

So, God works. And how many thousands of people were later converted through the ministry of Charles Spurgeon.

[28 : 50] Because on one wintry day, God directed his path into this chapel where he showed him Christ and drew him to faith. And I see many encouragements from this account.

Parents, God has other instruments he can use to drive home the vital blow. Yes, he's using your influence. Don't stop. But if you're not seeing God put in the vital blow, here's another example. Spurgeon under the means of grace daily in his home, in his grandfather's home. And yet God is pleased to use another instrument to save him. You remember John Bunyan, the writer of Pilgrim's Progress, he wrote his testimony, grace abounding to the chief of sinners.

How did God save this man? His writings went on and his preachings went on to be used to save many. Many. there were some washer women, godly washer women, on break, standing around talking about the things of God.

And hiding behind a hedge is John Bunyan listening. And God used their words as an instrument of conversion. Flavel talks about a man who was sick in bed and his old neighbor, almost 76 years old, came to visit him.

[30 : 13] He was a very religious, moral man, from a good family, did many good works, but he was lost. He was like the Pharisees. Another man came to visit at the same time.

He was a Christian. And so with both men present, this man that's sick on his bed spoke to the Christian man, while the other lost man was dead. He's speaking to the Christian about how many people there are who are trusting in their good deeds, but who have never come to Jesus Christ to be saved by him.

He wouldn't direct the speech to this unsaved neighbor. He's talking to this Christian friend about people who trust in their own works instead of Christ.

And the old religious lost neighbor sitting by the bedside listened and God was pleased to convince him that he was just such a person as that, trusting in his good deeds and not in Christ.

He did then trust in Christ to save him and he would say afterwards, had I died before I was 76, I would have perished for I knew not Christ. Providence used sickness.

[31 : 20] Providence used a good relationship with a neighbor such that the neighbor would visit his sick friend. A well-timed visit by another Christian. Few words spoken and he was converted.

God says in Galatians 4, as you know it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Now we don't understand what he meant by that.

We don't know the historical setting, but evidently the Galatians knew. As you know it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel. What was the instrument, the means, the circumstances which God brought the gospel to these Galatians so that they would be converted? It was an illness. And we don't know how, but somehow this illness figured into the itinerary of Paul as he's traveling and either caused him to go to Galatia or to prolong his visit in Galatia such that they heard the gospel because of his illness.

How many times have we seen that happen that because of an illness, because of a doctor's visit, a hospital visit, people hear the gospel that otherwise wouldn't?

[32:29] God has often used that as a means of conversion. One of the most amazing converting providences, I think, in the Bible is the thief on the cross. I wonder if you've thought of the providence of God in that man's conversion.

He's lived a wicked life. He's now going to pay for his sins against the nation. He's going to be executed. What a kind providence of God that this sinner finds himself hung up to die on the same day, on the same hill, right beside the only Savior of sinners, Jesus Christ.

If he'd have been executed a day before, a day after, in a different place, he wouldn't have met the Savior. But he's dying right beside the Lord Jesus, and there he's watching him, and he's listening to him.

And though he starts out mocking him, he's struck. Jesus says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they're doing. And he sees how he suffers, and he hears the words, and the grace, and his voice, and it's there that he puts his trust in the Savior.

Remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he heard those words of promise, today you will be with me in paradise. Amazing providence to have spent his whole life in sin, and then to meet and be saved by Jesus Christ in the last hours of his ill-spent life.

[34:03] Or the Philippian jailer. Paul and Christ are in prison for the gospel. They're being mistreated, persecuted, thrown into the inner dungeon. Why?

So that the gospel might come to a jailer. And so God uses a well-timed earthquake and the persecution of his servants to cause the jailer to despair of life.

He's ready to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners have escaped. Paul says, no, we're all here. He falls down. What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

He believes. His whole household believes conversion through imprisonment. I like to refer to this as prison evangelism from the inside.

Sometimes we go into prisons with the gospel. Paul goes into prison as a prisoner and it's in that way that he brings conversions. Onesimus seems to have met Onesimus was Philemon's runaway slave that seems to have got into some trouble and ended up in a prison with Paul and is converted and Paul is sending him back to his Christian master Philemon a saved brother in Christ.

[35:19] scattering of Christians in Acts 4 by persecution and wherever they went they gossiped the gospel and all sorts of people were converted.

There were many Europeans who fled religious persecution in Europe and they came to North America and they brought the gospel to North American Indians. there was a notorious drunkard whom other drunks called father and he went to hear a holy minister with no other goal in mind but to mock him but in the prayer before the sermon his heart began to soften and at the announcing of his text he was further wounded and was saved by that one sermon from John 5 14 go and sin no more lest something worse happen to you.

God has used the very malice of Satan and men evil men to convert sinners. Flavel talks about a minister who was once on a journey and he came upon a group of vain men and two of them were there wrestling in the grass and just as he came near one wrestler had thrown the other down and was standing triumphant in his strength and victory.

Well the minister rode up to him and said friend I see that you are a strong man but let not the strong man boast of his strength. You must know that you are not in a wrestling match with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness.

How sad will it be that Satan should at last trip up the heels of your hope and give you an eternal overthrow. And he spoke for about 15 minutes and left and went on his way and the man could not escape those words and he was convicted of his sins.

[37:05] And found rest in Christ. Think of John Newton's conversion. Drunken blaspheming slave trader. How the Lord saved him.

Many providences. Read that testimony if you haven't. Sometimes God just stirs up memory as a means of conversion.

Luke Short was a farmer in New England who lived to be 100 years old in great strength but he never sought peace with God. One day he sat in his fields reflecting upon his long life and he recalled a sermon that he had heard in Dartmouth England as a boy before they had sailed to America.

And the horror of dying under the curse of God was impressed upon him as he meditated on the words he had heard so long ago and he was converted on the spot. It was John Flavel who had

preached in Dartmouth 85 years ago to this 15 year old boy.

God controls the memory of men and those verses of scriptures and those devotions around the family table and those sermons and Sunday school lessons he's able to stir up as a means of conversion.

[38 : 23] A London gentleman wanted to buy a book of plays from a bookshop so he goes into the bookshop I want such and such book of plays. The owner was a godly man who didn't have the plays but he recommended John Flavel's book Keeping the Heart instead.

The would-be reader scorned and threatened to burn the book but he took it and returned a month later saying God had used it to save his soul. God has used tracks books CDs tapes of sermons to save people.

And so we ought to be encouraged to get out the gospel. Well we could tell many other providences just to wrap it up with this application.

Three applications. Give thanks to God for the providence that he used in your life the ways that he brought you to faith be it parents whatever he used.

We should have special gratitude in our heart to God for his providence that set us in the way of conversion. Secondly pray on for lost loved ones. You pray to a God of providence who controls all things who has many instruments in his arsenal to convert people many tools that we don't even know about that he's able to use to strike home the saving blow.

[39 : 52] And then third seek to be yourself such an instrument in his hands in giving out the gospel and an invitation to church and something written of the gospel.

Give thanks pray on and be yourself an instrument of providence in the conversion of others. May the Lord bless our study of providence and conversion. We're dismissed.