

# Providence in Our Employment

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Well, the providence of God is our subject, and last week it was the providence of God in our conversion. How God brought the instruments of conversion, the means that He used into our lives to turn us and to change us, to convert us.

We looked at examples from the Bible, from church history in our own lives. We ran out of time. I just wanted to mention, as we review, what instrument did God use in that greedy tax collector, Zacchaeus, to convert him?

What were his instruments? Mark? His height. Isn't that something? The one who was fitting him together in his mother's womb made him short, or he might not have done what he did.

What else did he use? Pardon? A tree. A well-suited tree. Who knows how that seed got carried to that spot along the road where Jesus would one day come by.

What else did he use? Alright, Jesus aggressive seeking him. Why is Zacchaeus even there that day in the parade?

[1:25] Jim? Alright. Which seems to be nothing more than curiosity at this point. You know that God rules over the curiosity of men.

And uses it to stir up men to do things. And so he's in the crowd. He wants to see Jesus. He's heard about this miracle worker. Well, the wonderful ways of God's providence.

Bringing him and Jesus together. And before the day's out, he's converted. We hardly know what desire was in the heart. And what instruments and means were involved in the heart of that Canaanite prostitute Rahab.

When the two spies knocked at her door. But before that matter was resolved, she is converted to the one true God. Faith in God that was counted to her for righteousness, James says.

And so, again, the strange ways that God seeks and saves sinners. What about some of the different reasons that people attend church?

[2:30] Many people are converted in church. Under the sound of the preaching of the gospel. What have been some of the reasons that people have come to church? That God has used.

Chuck? Oh, this church you mean rather than another. All right. Because we had a nice parking lot. All right. That's a strange providence.

And it shows how broad God's ways are. Linda. Pardon? A sense of guilt. I'm not right with God. I'm because I'm guilty. Parents. What do you mean by that? Oh, so the habit was raised early. We had that mentioned earlier, didn't we?

Last week. Yeah. Sharon. Ah. I've sat and had interviews with people wanting to join the church who have told their testimony.

[3:32] And that has been in there. We brought our children to church because they needed to know about God. And what they found out was they needed Christ themselves. And they were converted.

Somebody else said something. A book or track that brought them. Judy. Or, sorry, Beth. Somebody asked them to come.

I read a testimony this week about somebody who was asked to come. And simply to satisfy the invitation, came. And now, professes faith in Christ.

Yes. I'm dating the boy who was asked. Okay. Came. Because there's a lot of good looking girls at the church. Or fellas. And out of that, God has saved people.

I'm sorry. There. You all right? Weather. Yeah. We saw that with Spurgeon, didn't we? That God used weather to drive. But, again, just appreciate the fact that as we sit here week after week, we little know what God is doing with the people that come through our doors.

[4:38] Why are they here? Who knows? God does. And what has been his intention in bringing them here? Will we be ready to engage them with the gospel and be a part, an instrument in that providence of God to convert sinners?

Well, that was last week. And we saw the application. We ought to be thanking God for the providence that brought us to the gospel and saved us.

We ought to seek to go on praying for conversions. God has many instruments to use that we know nothing of. And then be involved yourself as an instrument, as an instrument in the conversion of others.

Now, today, Flavel takes up the providence of God in our employments, our callings in life. This area takes up a huge amount of our lifetime.

About a third of your adult life is given to your employments. About a half of your waking hours. So it's not a small area that Flavel's picking on.

[5:46] He's rather saying, okay, this is a big part of all of our lives. Let's see if we can appreciate something of the providence of God in this area. Now, providence, as we have noted, has interest in the good of believers.

It has interest in both your body and soul. The good of both your body and soul. It has your well-being not only in the world to come in mind, but it has your well-being in this world as well. And much of the good you receive from God here in this world depends upon the vocation and employment into which God leads you by his providence.

So let's think of some of these blessings that come to you in the area of your employment. Number one, from God directing you. Think of the blessings that come from God directing you into a calling in your youth and not permitting you to live an idle, useless, and sinful life, as many do, who are burdens on society, leeches on the body politic, existing only to drain it, eating what others earn. Now, that's a long sentence, but it's setting forth a blessing for having found work early in our lives, being directed into an employment, to be delivered from a life that's idle, useless, and sinful.

[7:18] So here's God's will for his world and for his people. 1 Thessalonians 4, 11, and 12. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders, and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

God's will is for you to work with your hands, so that you will not be dependent upon anybody. Now, that is to be your aim, your ambition, what you are seeking after, to be a contributing member to society. Now, there may be uncontrollable circumstances that make that impossible for you, and we realize that.

But it is to be that which everyone seeks and strives for. It's to be your ambition, what you're aiming at, is what Paul refers to it as.

To make others better off because of you, not worse off by being a drain on society. So tomorrow is April the 15th. Did you pay into the system again this year? Good for you.

[8:40] You're a contributing member of society. That is God's will for you, that you work with your own hands and not be dependent upon others.

2 Thessalonians 3.10, the God-given rule is, if a man will not work, he should not eat. And that's not just a rule for the lazy man to hear.

Who is that addressed to? The church. The church. The church at Thessalonica, in with these lazy guys. But the rule is not just for the lazy man, it's for the church in which the lazy man is found.

And Paul says, if he is unwilling to work, then whatever you do, don't give him anything to eat. To do so is not compassion, it is sin. It's doing them harm. It's stealing. It's taking away something important from them.

[9:48] What is it taking away? Proverbs 15.26 says, the laborer's appetite works for him, his hunger drives him on. So he's the laborer, and it's hard work.

He needs motivation to get up and get out of bed and go to work. What will drive him on? What will motivate him? Well, some growling of his stomach, some hunger pains, is meant to motivate him. And if you're stealing, that God built in motivation to work. Hunger. Don't do it. That's God's rule to the church.

And Paul goes on to say, we hear that some among you are idle. They're not busy, they're busy bodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

So it's a command of the Lord Jesus to earn their own bread and not eat that of another. So idleness is a sin. And one way God has kept us from such a sinful lifestyle is by providing callings for us, employments that have enabled us to avoid an idle life.

[11:08] And also to avoid a host of other temptations that come to us because of idleness. What's the old proverb? Idle hands are the devil's workshop.

It's just acknowledging that in a state of idleness, we find ourselves tempted to do any other sins. God has spared us from all that by giving us useful employment to do, things to do in the way of our calling.

And he gives us employment not only that we'll have something to eat, but also that we'll have something to give to others who are truly in need. Ephesians 4.28, there are those who are truly in need, and that's one reason he's given you employment.

Ephesians 4.28, he who has been stealing must not only stop stealing, steal no longer, but he must work doing something useful with his own hands that he may have something to share with those in need.

So God's intention for our work is that we might not only eat our own bread, but we might have that which to give to others who are truly in need. And thereby, we get to reap the benefit of joy and happiness because it's more happy to give than to receive.

[12:27] So that's one of the blessings he gives us through gainful employment in life. The blessing of giving. So this first point, this reminds us, work is important to God.

It's what he wants, how he wants his world operating. Work is one of those creation ordinances of God even before the fall. God put Adam in the garden, said get to work.

Before the fall, God said you're to work six days and then rest the seventh, but six days are for work following his own example. So it's no small blessing to have been directed by providence into useful and profitable work.

Now the second thing is to recognize the blessing of God not only directing you into employments that are lawful, but even most suitable to you.

Two things here. First of all, have a lawful calling. Not all callings in life are lawful. He cites Acts 19, Demetrius and the craftsmen of Ephesus.

[13:36] They had tremendous gifts in artistry and working with metals, but what did they use that gift for? To make shrines to the goddess of Deanna.

And that's not something God wanted done in his world. That's not something that is a lawful calling. And so in our day, there are many unlawful callings, things that require us to break God's commands in order to do the work.

And if in this wicked world you still have a lawful calling, you are to bless God and his providence for giving you such so that you're not dishonoring God as you seek to benefit yourself.

But it's a double blessing when not only do you have lawful work, but you have work that fits your God-given abilities and strengths and gifts.

Friday night we watched the DVD, Gifted Hands, on Dr. Ben Carson. Tremendous God-given abilities and gifts. And in the providence of God, he was given a mother to draw out those gifts and to turn off the television and to put books into his hands.

[14:54] And God's providence also used schools to further train him in those gifts and opening doors into an occupation that used those gifts so that he's now the world-renowned neurosurgeon and director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

And you sense something of his enjoyment in doing what God has given him abilities to do. Such as a double blessing from God's providence when you not only have lawful work, but work that you sense fits you and suits your abilities.

A third blessing in the providence of God. Perhaps God has given you employment that neither you nor your parents could ever have expected you to have.

So God takes David from tending sheep to make him the royal shepherd of Israel. Who would have thought?

Surely not his father. Surely not even the prophet Samuel. He thought maybe the brother, but not him. Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

[16:09] Fishermen. But Christ called them to be fishers of men. Something they probably never thought of as they were helping their father pull in the nets.

Martin Luther's father designed him to be a lawyer. That's what he had him schooled for and trained for and he wanted him to be able to support him and his wife in their old age.

And so he was horrified when Luther became a monk. But God had other plans and amazing providence, a thunderbolt, a lightning bolt from heaven that stopped him in the direction he was going and turned him around and caused him to join a monastery.

And from there, it's just one step after another that brought him into the ministry and converted him and made him such a blessing not only to his own generation, but to generations after him.

Again, employment that neither you nor your parents could have expected. Tremendous illustrations, then, of the providence of God that we about.

[17 : 22] And then, we need to appreciate the way God's providence has prepared you for and led you into your calling. How was Moses, perhaps, prepared in some ways to do business with the Pharaoh of Egypt on behalf of God and his people?

Remember, his job is going to be to be dealing one-on-one with the Pharaoh of Egypt in bringing God's people out. How did God prepare him, Jim?

Okay. All right. So, he's raised right within Pharaoh's household. He's brought up in all the wisdom of the, he understands how the Pharaoh operates and the whole business.

How did he get there? Kind of a strange providence, wasn't it? He was in a basket. and Pharaoh's daughter happened to be bathing there and heard him crying and the rest is history.

But God was preparing him for a later work that he would do and who knows what all advantages and preparation came by understanding the insides of business in the Pharaoh's household.

[18 : 39] how was God preparing David for his work out there on the hills of Bethlehem? Pardon?

Time with God. Alone, away from men. Time to meditate. Time to, I mean, read the Psalms and you'll see what he was doing.

Meditating on God. thinking about God. Praying, talking with God. All in preparation for that day when he would be called upon to lead a nation.

How did God prepare the Apostle Paul for his calling in life? Where did he go to school?

Okay. Peter Gamaliel, the leading teacher. As a Pharisee of the Pharisees, he's brought up in the strictest sect.

[19 : 45] And what does Paul dismantle more than anything else in his preaching than the religion of the Pharisees? This religion of human merit, that what we do earns favor with God and merits our...

How did God prepare him for that? He had him be a Pharisee. One of the leading, rising lights in Phariseeism. And so God's providence prepared him and had him well suited to attack this damning religion of man's merit.

We could think of Timothy. How did God prepare Timothy for his calling? A godly grandmother and mother. father. What further training did he receive for the ministry?

Under Paul. Okay. So he labors as a child in the gospel of Paul and what things he must have learned.

I can only say the same is true in my life as I look back and say, how did God train me to be a minister? Well, he had me born in a minister's home. And that was tremendous benefit to me.

[21 : 02] Am I saying that's the only way, the best way to train a minister? No. But it was the best way for me. It was God's way for me. And if you look back and see, how is God in his providence ordering and directing and preparing me for my present employment, ways that he closed certain doors and opened others and moved you around to where you are?

Well, then there's the blessing of the work of your hands and protecting what you have labored for in your employment. So you have a calling in employment and God has providentially blessed that working.

And then he's protected what you have made in that employment. Remember Job. What's Satan's complaint to God? Does Job fear you for nothing?

Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.

So here's this man and he's a farmer and he's living with flocks and herds and God blesses them and they multiply and it's because God has blessed him and then God put a hedge of protection around what he had blessed him with.

[22:29] So there's a double blessing here in God's providence upon our employments. There's God blessing the work of your hands and then protecting it. Let's think first of the blessing of the work of your hands.

It's gardening time again and I realize that that's not our employments is it? But it was an agrarian society that most of the Bible was written in and that was not just their hobby it was their livelihood. But one thing you learn when you get into this business is that not all seed put into the ground bears an abundant harvest. There's all sorts of things that can ruin the harvest.

Disease and blight and drought. The spiritual parables refer to that. There's crows that can pick up the seed and there's hard ground and all thorns and any number of things.

And Paul says one can sow in another water but God must give the increase. Now he's speaking of spiritual things there. But he's using the natural world as an example to the spiritual.

[23:39] And what's true in the spiritual world is true in the natural. That's why he uses the illustration. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God who makes things grow.

So we sing the song. We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand. He sends the snow in winter the warmth to swell the grain the breezes and the sunshine and soft refreshing rain.

All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above. He blesses you see the work of our hands and so we have abundance and so we have a harvest without that blessing the work of our hands no matter how hard we work can come to nothing.

there are forces that loosen the world that would bring it to nothing did God not bless the work of our hands.

A sagging economy can affect our own work. Our job may be the cuts at our place of employment. Things happening half the way around the world can affect our employment here.

[25:00] So not all we set our hands to prospers. Therefore we're right to ask God to bless the work of our hands. To bless us in our employments and to give us an increase from what we seek to do.

And when we have profitable gainful employment it's God that we ought to thank for blessing the work of our hands.

You have blessed the work of his hands Satan complains. Then there's the protecting what we gain from loss. Have you not put a hedge around him in everything he has?

Not only blessing and multiplying his fox but then once he had all of that God was protecting it from loss. Without that protection we could easily lose everything that we have gained by our hard labor. Haggai 1 in verse 6 God says to his people you've planted much but have harvested little you eat but never have enough you drink but never have your fill you put on clothes but are not warm here it is you earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it what happens when you put money in purses with holes in it you lose what you work so hard for that's the picture here they were losing all that they had worked so hard for he goes on to say you expected much but see it turned out to be little what you brought home I blew away you see you did bring home a lot perhaps but what you brought home I blew away why declares the Lord Almighty because of my house which remains a ruin while each of you is busy with his own house so there are such things as purses with holes in them and it may be an unexpected health problem that soaks up some of that money in our purses it might be other unexpected accidents and expenses and thieves and storms and who knows what it's just showing God is the God of providence and he must not only bless what we have but he must protect and keep what we have or there are ways for holes for him to create holes in our purses so that it all falls out so these are some of the ways that

[27:28] God's providence is seen in our employment now Flavel knows that not all have shared equally in God's providence in this matter of employment so he addresses some objections that some might raise and he gives us some wise counsel here's what he says first if any that fear God shall complain that although they have a calling yet it's a hard and laborious one which takes up too much of their time which they would gladly employ in other and better work I answer that it's likely that the wisdom of providence foresaw this to be the most suitable and proper employment for you and if you had more ease and rest you might have more temptation than now you have you might have used the extra strength to serve yourself and the devil instead of God also consider that by your hard labor it might be that your health is better served now there's a blessing you say it's just hard work well that may be

God's way of doing your body good so that you'll enjoy your sleep and your rest more it's no small blessing is it to have a good night sleep some don't have that ecclesiastes 5 12 the sleep of a laborer is sweet whether he eats little or much but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep and that's for the service of God that you say I just have to work so hard at my calling I don't have any time for the service of God if your hearts are spiritual you may enjoy much communion with God in your very employments with time for this throughout the day have you not more spare hours than you employ to that end so Flavel is answering some of the objections here's another but all my work will scarcely meet our needs well consider how many there are that are lower than yourself in the world you have little but many others have even less to have food and clothing and God with it is to have all you need for contentment Hebrews 13 5 keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said never will I leave you never will I forsake you to have him as your helper is enough to be content if you can believe it God's providence has ordered that condition for you which is really best for your eternal good I say if you can believe it that's the truth and if you can believe it you would come to contentment and rest to know that God's providence has ordered that condition for you which is really best for your eternal good remember the working definition of God's providence is that somebody help me how does it begin God's most holy wise and powerful upholding and controlling it's his wise ordering and controlling in your employment he didn't have his wisdom on the shelf when he's been working out your employment matters no it's his wisdom that orders his providence and makes no mistakes Flavel says if you had more of the world than you have you might not be able to handle it in a beneficial way God knows better than I what is best for my soul Isaiah 48 17 this is what the word says your redeemer the holy one of Israel I am the Lord your God who teaches you what is best for you who directs you in the way that you should go psalm 37 11 better the little that the righteous have than the riches of many wicked f lavel says it's better in the getting of the little sweeter in the enjoyment of the little and more comfortable in giving account for the little in the end because to whom much is given much will be required better the little that the righteous have and the riches of many wicked so in our employments we're to recognize

God's most holy and wise upholding and controlling of all things for our good f lavel then concludes the chapter with some applications for how to walk pleasing to the Lord in answer to his kind providences in our employments has God done that for us now how do we walk pleasing to the Lord in our number one do not be lazy and idle in your callings the command to Adam reaches all his descendants by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you return!

[32 : 56] Flavel says if you're negligent in work you cannot be innocent and then secondly he says and yet do not be so given to your work that you make them interfere with your other responsibilities don't be so given to your employments that all else that God must take a back seat that's a delicate juggling act to do in our day and age and I suppose it was a difficult juggling act to do in Flavel's age I would imagine it was harder to eke out a living then than it is today it finds its way into his book be careful that you do not forget God in the hurry of earthly importance 1st Timothy 6 people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil and some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs so if your work is causing you to neglect your

God given responsibilities you're working too much you need to work less make less live on less but don't neglect!

for work the inhabitants of Innoe a dry island near Athens so here's this island and it's dry that's hard for us to imagine surrounded by water but the island itself is dry the inhabitants of this island bestowed much labor to draw in a river to water it and make it fruitful but when the sluices were open the waters flowed so abundantly that it overflowed the!

and drowned the inhabitants and he says the application is obvious is it that our employments and our work can swap us up if we're not careful so Seneca says I do not give but lend myself to business!

who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms his covenant which he swore to your forefathers as it is today so humbly ask him to bless the work of your hands and then humbly commit to him your business plans trusting in him for the blessing today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and stay there a year and buy and sell and get gain if the Lord wills we will carry out

these plans seeking his blessing and lastly number four learn contentment in your station and employment in which providence has placed you if providence opens a door of opportunity for improvement pray seek godly counsel and under his blessing proceed do not believe it is wrong for a believer to seek to improve their station their employment situation but let it not be discontentment with

[ 36 : 48 ] God's providence that drives your employment in the world Paul says whatever state I am therein to be content I've learned that have you learned contentment on your present employment he's wanting you to learn that perhaps before he opens a door elsewhere to another job he's wanting you first to learn contentment with this one because a greater blessing than an improved job situation is a heart content with what God's providence has ordered for you God's providence is wiser than men child of God you can be sure he is seeking your everlasting good that's the goal God has in mind in ordering all things for the good of his people for those who love him and are called by his purpose so may the Lord help us as we return to work tomorrow and to the callings that

God has given us there to honor him in this huge area of our lives there to recognize the providence of God putting me there at least for now I'm here and I'm here with a purpose and so let's embrace that and seek to glorify God in it our time is gone but we're dismissed Thank you.