**PROVIDENCE (#3)**

***Miracles and Providence***

Providence is simply defined as God’s omniscient ability to foresee the needs of people and then use His omnipotence to provide for that need. God sees beyond the present into the future and not only anticipates our needs but plans for their solutions. In Biblical days He worked His providence in two ways. One way was miraculously where He accomplished things independent of natural laws. The other way was naturally (i.e. non-miraculous) in which He used His natural laws to provide the need.

We humans are a weak and needy people. We are constantly overwhelmed with issues and problems that drive us to our knees. As Jeremiah once neatly put it, *“O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps”* (Jer. 10:23). Or as a despondent Job pithily described our earthly existence: “​*Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble*” (Job 14:1). Life is hard. To try to go through it without divine help is a fool’s errand. To put it bluntly, we desperately need help… God’s help! Without it we are to be pitied as defenseless and hopeless. Or, as I used to hear as a kid, “we are up the creek without a paddle.”

Think of two Biblical examples of God’s providence with the births of two sons. Mary, a virgin, having never sexually known a man, miraculously became pregnant and gave birth to Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25; Lk. 1:30-37). Hannah, a wife who longed to be a mother, prayed for a son and was heard by God. She conceived after her husband “*knew her*” and gave birth to Samuel (I Sam. 1:19-20). The first was miraculous, the second was natural.

Another example of God’s providence is the amazing story found in Isaiah 37. The Assyrian king Sennacherib had brought his army of 185,000 soldiers to lay siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah, the godly king of Judah, prayed to God to defend them. God sent word through Isaiah that He would not let them even fire an arrow at the city. That night God sent an angel to kill the entire army in a single stroke! Then He sent a rumor to the king that there was trouble back home, which led him to quickly rush back to Nineveh. There his sons assassinated him. Thus, God worked both miraculously (killer angel), and naturally (assassination), to answer Hezekiah’s prayer for deliverance. God can work either way just as efficiently today, but chooses to do it naturally (the age of miracles has “*failed, ceased, vanished away*” (I Cor. 13:8).

Far too many people believe that God has to work via miracles to prove His interest and care for us. That is putting God in a box and demanding He must verify His existence with spectacular demonstrations. He must confirm His love for us by suspending natural laws by answering our prayers and supplying our needs miraculously. The fact of the matter is that throughout history, even Biblical history, God has worked far more by natural means than by supernatural. Yes, He began the world with miracles, but then set in motion the laws of nature to bless mankind.

God’s providence has been working non-miraculously for the past 2,000 years. Yes, is it not His providence that sends His sun to shine and His rain to fall on the just and unjust (Matt. 5:45)? And is it not His providence that it is said about Christians, “*my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:19), and “*God is able to make all grace abound toward you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work*” (2 Cor. 9:8)?

Just look at the cases of conversion in the Bible. Jesus had promised that those who “*hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled*” (Matt. 5:6). The Ethiopian eunuch is a prime example of that as God led Philip to rendezvous with that south-bound chariot headed to Africa (Acts 8:25-40). Cornelius is a perfect example of Peter connecting with this truth seeker to lead his family to Christ (Acts 10). Paul and Silas connecting with the jailer in Philippi was not by miracle, but by providence (Acts 16). On and on we could go to show how the seeker meets the evangelist (Lk. 19:10). No miraculous conversions are found in the book of Acts. Sure, the apostles received a miracle with the baptism of the Spirit, and Philip was instructed to join that chariot, but that did not covert anyone’s heart, it only opened the door by allowing a teacher to meet a seeker.

The story of Onesimus in the book of Philemon is a glaring example of God’s providence in conversion. Paul wrote to his former convert (“*you owe me even your own self besides*” – v19) on behalf of his runaway slave who had run into Paul and been converted (“*whom I have begotten while in my chains*” – v10). Now here’s the providence part: “*For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose* (his conversion)*, that you might receive him forever*” (in heaven) – v15). Paul himself cannot positively point the finger at this case and say dogmatically that God connected Onesimus to him, leading to his conversion. But he doesn’t rule it out either. It was not a miracle, but it was possibly providential.

God undoubtedly does the same thing today. I’m confident things are not always “coincidence,” or “lucky,” but the working of the hand of God in the lives of those who “*diligently seek Him*” (Heb. 11:6). I’ve been connected to scores of seekers in my life who were searching for truth, leading them to Christ’s salvation. There were no miracles involved, but there had to be God’s handiwork to make the seemingly impossible… possible.

Think back on your own conversion story. Think through all the circumstances that had to fall into place for you to find the truth which saved you. Surely all those events and people that came into your life that led to your baptism were not all an accident, a fluke, a quirk, a mere happenstance. “*Seek and you shall find*” is not a game of hide-n-seek, it is an amazing story of God’s providential hand in your life.

Thinking of God working through all the events that led to my salvation I sing these words:

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene,   
And wonder how He could love me, a sinner condemned unclean.  
How marvelous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be;  
How marvelous! How wonderful! Is my Savior’s love for me!”

Proverbially speaking, in my life God’s providence is “the eighth wonder of the world!” What is it to you?

I love you. – Rick