**PROVIDENCE (#2)**

***How Do I Know When God Is Involved In My Life?***

When I was a kid growing up in Tennessee I often heard in announcements and in prayers, “brother Smith and sister Jones were providentially hindered from being here due to sickness.” It bothered me then, it bothers me still. It was as if they claimed that God had hindered them from being at worship services by causing their sickness.

Another enigma to me was the use of the phrase, “it was an act of God.” Lawyers use that in their terminology, as do insurance contracts and other legal jargon. It is as if a tornado, lightening strike, earthquake or forest fire was sent by God to destroy a neighborhood or kill a person. That is a strange way to perceive the hand of God in all matters we cannot explain otherwise.

God’s providence is something I strongly believe in because the Bible tells me He is active in His universe. God revealed by inspiration that He “*created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen. 1:1), and that He continues to “*uphold all things by the word of His power*” (Heb. 1:3). He expressed it another way when He said, “*in Him all things consist*” (Col. 1:17). That’s present tense, meaning He even now keeps the world running. Jesus said that birds “*neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them*” (Matt. 6:26). Jesus added that God “*clothes the grass of the field*” even though “*they neither toil nor spin*” (Matt. 6:28-30). God is so involved in life on earth that He even takes notice of a tiny sparrow’s death and can count the very hairs (or lack thereof) on our head (Matt. 10:29-30).

All we really need to know to answer the question of God’s providential involvement in our lives is to quote the famous John 3:16. “*God so loved the world that He gave*…” You can finish that sentence, and in so doing have forever answered whether God sees, knows, and cares about you. Blood dripping from the head, hands, side, back and feet of His Son on my behalf forever settles the issue of God’s intimate love for me. Since Calvary’s cross no man can ever again say that God is not involved in my life.

Providence is God foreseeing our need, then “providing” a solution, whether it is physical or spiritual. Physically, He provides food, clothing and shelter (Matt. 6:19-30). God “*gives to all life, breath, and all things*” and in Him “*we live, move and have our being*” (Ac. 17:25-28). Spiritually, He provides grace and mercy to save our soul (Tit. 1:11-14).

But now we come to the question asked in the title of this article. How do I know when God is involved in my life? The answer is both simple and complex.

It’s *simple* as you read the verses I quoted above. That breath you just took was God’s providence. Your breakfast this morning was God’s providence (I hope you gave Him thanks). The vision to read this is God’s providence. You get my drift. God is intimately involved in every area of your life (read Psalm 147-148).

It’s *complex* by wondering about every decision and every outcome of my life. Was God directing me to marry Benita, have two sons and a daughter, preach in Minnesota, be a member of this fellowship at Northwest, and … (in other words, was God dictating all the decisions and details of my life)? I cannot answer that question because there is no revelation in the Bible that reveals exactly what God is doing in these matters.

Peter reminds me, “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*” (I Pet. 4:11). Moses reminds me, “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever*” (Deut. 29:29). I cannot positively say, as would a Calvinist, that God wrote out my life in every detail before I was ever born and I had no choice but to do everything as I have done, am doing, or will do. That nullifies free will, which the Bible clearly teaches (“*choose you this day who you will serve*” – Josh. 24:15; “*I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life*” – Deut. 30:19).

We read stories in the Bible like the life of Joseph or Esther and see God’s fingerprints all over their biography. Joseph lived his life not knowing all the decisions he was making were part of God’s divine providence. At age 17 he was sold by his brothers into slavery. It was not until he was 39, as his brothers were begging for their lives, that he could look back on all that happened over the past 22 years and say, “…*you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring it about as it is this day to save many people alive*” (Gen. 50:19-20). Only in hindsight could he see God’s providence.

Esther had no idea that God was working behind the scenes to use her to save the Jews from genocide by the Persians. Mordecai sent these immortal words to her: *“Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this*?” (Esth. 4:13-14). Indeed, who knows? Only in hindsight could the Jews look back and see God’s providential hand.

So it is with us. Unless God has given a specific revelation on a matter then we cannot say one way or the other whether it is providential. There are many things where I can confidently state God’s involvement in my life because God told me in His word. But there are many other things that have happened in my life that I might feel are the hand of God, but since He has not told me then I cannot be dogmatic.

I have had people tell me that God led a certain person into their life to marry, only to turn into a disastrous marriage that ended in ruined lives. I’m sure you have experienced the same stories too. We must be careful to point the finger of “providence” toward God when He has not revealed it. But we also must keep an open mind that God does indeed rule in the kingdoms of men, and in the lives of men, and is intimately involved in the Christian’s life. Perhaps in heaven there will be a documentary movie that God will play for each of us that allows us, like Joseph, to be able to say “*that was God’s doing*.”

Until then, walk by faith that God sees you, knows you, loves you, hears you, and saves you. That is enough.

I love you. - Rick