

God's Eternal Purpose, Predestination, Providence

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Special

By Steve Martin

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Sovereign Joy Community Church
4740 Western Center Blvd.
Haltom City, TX 76137

Website: sovjoy.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/sovjoy

I rejoiced to be with you last fall. By God's grace I preached to you on 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For God made him who knew no sin to become sin that we believing sinners might become the righteousness of God in him." Then a couple of weeks later I preached to you on Hebrews 10:14, "By a single offering he has perfect for all time those he is making holy." And I went through the different ramifications of understanding that being justified by faith alone, in Christ alone, is a tremendous blessing that affects all of your life from death and life, heartaches, trials, you name it, and if you don't get that straight, you're going to struggle. Well, by God's grace I hope that we got a lot of that.

Today we're in different circumstances. March 6, I had my left hip replaced and so for those of you who don't believe that, I understand you have a meeting afterwards. I was going to do cartwheels here to show you my hip but I won't since you have a meeting, but for those of you who would like to stay after. But that was a great blessing. I'm so much more spry and can walk and not have any pain and it's a great blessing and your church has undergone a change too and I grieve with you. There was something of a tremor in north Johnson County where I live in southern Mansfield, some called it an earthquake, some of you might have thought that God fell off his throne and was not aware of what's going on in your church. That's not true.

Today we're going to look at three things in the passage before us in Romans 8:28, 29 and 30. We're going to look at God's sovereign and eternal purpose; that God has a purpose, God has a plan. In fact, it was jilting for me several years ago to read in Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones treatment of Habakkuk when I was going through a very hard time and I was reading it out loud to my wife and Dr. Lloyd-Jones said, "God has an eternal purpose, an eternal plan, and thank God that it includes you but it's not about you." And I needed that that day. I needed to be reminded that I was safe under God's wings but what he was doing was not focused or centered on me. He had bigger issues but thankfully I was included in his bigger issues.

So the first thing we're going to look at is God's eternal sovereign plan. Second of all, we're going to look at God's eternal sovereign predestination. What does he predestinate us to? Some people are afraid of the word "predestination," I think we'll see very easily it's not something we should be afraid of or even to resist or reject. And third, we're going

to look at God's sovereign eternal providence. Every detail of every one of our lives has been sovereignly worked out. God's not fumbling around trying to figure out what to do next. He knows perfectly well all the circumstances that will make for your getting to glory, that will make for your sanctification in his glory.

Let's pray.

Our Father and our God, you are the great God and we are your people by grace. There was a time when we were not your people, there was a time when we loved this world only slightly less than we loved ourselves and we thought the world revolved around us. Graciously you showed us that we are not the center of the universe, that we aren't the greatest thing, and there is a God and it's not us, and in doing that you've humbled us and showed us our absolute need of salvation and that salvation couldn't be found in anything that we could do but only in your Son come from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. God became a man. As C. S. Lewis said, it's the greatest miracle in the history of the world. God became a man and lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial atoning death that all who trust in him might have forgiveness of sins, full pardon, complete forgiveness, new life in Christ, adoption as sons and daughters. Would you hear our prayer for Christ's sake? Would you bless us during this time? We're at a confusing, grieving, angered, frustrating time. Would you help us to see the truth of your word and to apply it to our situations? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I can remember when I became a Christian and I told you last time it was in 1969 and I made the joke that the earth's crust had just hardened so you could walk on it for those of you who have never heard of 1969, the olden days. I can remember about nine months into being a Christian I started having a couple of problems and the first thing that came into my mind and I tend to think in images and pictures, I was thinking, "Let's see, what would a fighter pilot do if he knew that a missile was coming toward his plane?" Well, he'd go into evasive maneuvers and so that was my strategy for dealing with problems. There was no problem that I could not evade or get away from or do something, only that didn't work. The problem was still there and I still had to face it and I began to see early on that my understanding of how things should go was not going to be God's way of how things should go and the way I thought was the way everybody else thinks. Most of my problems I could probably handle but there are some if I can't handle them, that I'll have to evade them or avoid them but God says, "I'm going to bring problems into your life that are handpicked for you, for your family, for this congregation, and that, no, you can't avoid them because I will bring them to you. You will see to that and you must trust me to work through them." I had to learn to trust God in these hard circumstances that I wanted to evade at all costs because if you would have asked me, if God had asked my counsel, a lot of those things were no fun and they were miserable and I told him he shouldn't give them to me and he chose to give them to me anyway. And I'm sure you've done that too, you've given God counsel. I can't imagine him up there scribbling down all of our counsel and the things that we've told him because it wasn't very good counsel, it was very immature counsel. It's like a two year old telling parents how to run the family and what food should be on the table and everything else.

Well, that's how I lived but it was interesting, again this goes way back to the 80's and 90's. For some of you, that's the olden days too but in the 80's and 90's there were some well-known Christians who were Christian psychologists. One was Dr. James Dobson who was head of Focus on the Family. Some of you may have listened to him on the radio, others may have heard of Dr. Larry Crabb who wrote a lot of books on Christian counseling, and both of them came to a realization during that period that was very startling and they wrote books about it. Dr. Dobson's book and, again I apologize for the light source here. I watched Jason hold his Bible kind of like this and I figured, "Whoa. That means I'm going to have to jerry-rig mine too." Dr. James Dobson wrote a book, "When God Doesn't Make Sense." Well, why would I ever think that I could understand everything about God in the first place? Why would I think that I've got God in a box, I've got him all figured out, I'm never surprised by him because I'm so smart I figured everything out? Well, no, that's not the way it is. He's the infinite God. He's infinitely smart, so to speak. He's omniscient and I don't know everything. So there are times when God flat-out doesn't make sense and he wrote about the fact that the reason why God doesn't make sense is that God's purposes in our problems are to bring us closer to him and to draw us closer to him and to make us like Christ, and so we shouldn't seek to evade them because they're handpicked by God to grow us. Almost at the same time, Dr. Larry Crabb wrote a book called, "Finding God," and he said, "I've spent my whole career trying to fix people's problems and I realized that God brings problems into our lives to draw us closer to him and to accomplish his sovereign purposes so I've changed the way I counsel, not to help people avoid problems or to fix them but to help people find the Lord in the midst of their problems."

Well, we need to rethink our whole attitude toward problems. Here in verses 28, 29 and 30, the Apostle Paul has spent time and you just had Romans 8 or a big chunk of it read to you, and Paul was saying, "Hey, we live in a fallen world." Now, Romans is the longest explanation of Christianity in the New Testament. It's the fullest explanation of Christianity. It's the fullest explanation of the eternal plan and purposes of God and by the time he's gotten to chapter 8, he's already explained the way of salvation, he's already explained grace, he's already explained justification by faith, now he's telling the Roman Christians, "Okay, we still have problems." He said, "The whole creation still groans." Believers still are frustrated by things that happen. Some days we can't wait to get to glory. Now he says, he goes on to talk about how the Spirit helps us to pray because sometimes we're so overwhelmed, so confused, so hurting, you don't even know what to pray. It says the Holy Spirit will help us. He will take our mangled muddled thoughts and he will reinterpret them back to the Father for Christ's sake. But then at the end of this passage, he says, "Now there are certain things I want you to understand because if you understand them, you'll keep your sanity." I don't know about you but sometimes I've met people who when a big problem comes, they run around and have like a hissy fit and they fall on the ground in a fetal position and they kind of suck their thumb. It's just all raw emotions. They don't stop and think and emotions are important, they're a rich part of our lives, but they're not the most important part. God wants us first of all to think and he wants us to think his thoughts after him. He just doesn't want us to have a hissy fit. He doesn't want us to run around like Chicken Little saying, "The sky is falling!" But he

wants us to trust him and say, "Okay, what should I be thinking about your thoughts after you? What are you saying in your word that I need to hear?"

And here in Romans 8:28 and 29 and really one of the first verses as a young believer I memorized was that, "All things work together for the good of those who love God, of those who are called according to his purpose." What is the eternal purpose of God? Well, that's the next verse, "That those whom he foreknew, that he knew before time and set his affection on, he predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son." Simply put, God's eternal purpose is to save a people and make them like Christ.

Now, for years I thought that God had saved me and brought me into a relationship with him that he would fix all of my problems and make me always happy with everything that was going on: my coach would remember my name and I would get to start or I would get to pitch, or the girl I liked would like me back, and all the kind of things you wish for at that age. Well, that didn't work and God apparently didn't care about my baseball career or my love life at that point, but he did care about making me like Christ and he was going to go about making me like Christ because that's his eternal purpose.

"For those whom he foreknew, he predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son." Excuse me, but I really can't read this. We were originally made in the image of God and it was stamped all over us but human beings have become like an old graveyard. I'm not a morbid person but when I visit historical sites and there's a historic graveyard, I like to go there and back East I was privileged to go to the graveyard of Princeton Seminary where a lot of worthies are buried like Jonathan Edwards and Charles Hodge and people like that, and one of the things that was a good reminder is that some of these graves were 300 years old. Some of these thick marble stones or granite stones were 300 years old, but unfortunately wind and rain and ice and snow and all kinds of things had worn the face of some of these gravestones almost smooth. You'd have to put a piece of paper and take a piece of charcoal or something to figure out what was originally on there and that's what's happened to the image of God in humanity. Since the fall, the image of God has been greatly marred, almost obliterated from mankind. It's put back there in a new way, a vibrant way, a much more clear-cut way. When you're born again, God puts the Spirit of God into your life, he puts the law of God on your heart not just on tablets of stone, and he begins to remake you after Christ. His purposes are to make you better than what the fall took away from humanity.

God is working in eternal purpose to make you like Christ. You were saved to know God. Our first parents knew God. They fellowshiped with him every day and as soon as the fall came, they hid from him in the bushes which you think, how childish can you be? You know, little kids do something and they hide. What did Adam and Eve do when they sinned? They hid in the bushes. Really? "Gosh, I don't know where they are. I can't see through the bushes." But here they are hiding in the bushes, having covered themselves with fig leaves, and sin has made us already foolish and rather stupid and really rather naive about our God but God is working to make us more like Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes to the Corinthians and he tells them this, he says, "As we all beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to the next." God is working day by day to make us more like Christ. That's his goal. Our happiness is a subset of making us holy like Christ. Happiness can come and go but holiness is something that God's working on all the time. Even on some of our darkest times, his greatest works are being accomplished. The most things that have been accomplished in my life are during the toughest times. Not during the easy times. Not when you're on cruise control but during some of the toughest times when I wouldn't have wished for in a million years, God purposed in order to make me like Christ.

It's absolutely essential that we understand the eternal purpose of God. What at first glance seems like a terrible thing, seems like it's, "What is God doing? This can't be his will." And yet it's his sovereign will and he's going to accomplish his good purposes. When we're tempted to think this can't be God's will because it's too hard, too messy, too miserable, too sad, it hurts too deep, the Lord is accomplishing his holy purposes. He will make us like Christ.

Did you ever have a teacher or a coach growing up that stretched you? That you didn't want to do those extra assignments or you didn't want to take that extra lap or in some way this person had their eye on you and thought, "This person could be better but they need to be pushed a little bit." So that teacher or coach or violin coach or whatever, kind of leader you had, pushed you to become better than you were and God says, "I'm the perfect Father. I don't let any of my children who have 8 cylinders run on just 4," to use an automobile analogy. "I will see to it that you grow and you grow up and you become mature in Christ and so I will use whatever is necessary. All the tools in my toolbox I will use for my eternal and sovereign purpose is that I have chosen you, I have predestinated all the circumstances and I'm going to make you like Christ, conformed to his image."

Conform means put into a mold. Francis Schaeffer used to use the word "extrude" and the idea of extrusion is you take a cylinder and you put something in it and then you put pressure on one end of the cylinder and you have on the other end where the nozzle is, you might have some kind of design. Women know what this is, it's putting icing on the cake and you have an icing thing, you put the icing in here, you put whatever's on the end, whatever a star or a flower, and you push it out and out it comes. So you kind of go, "So what are you saying?" I'm saying, well, God extrudes us under pressure to become more like Christ.

His goal isn't that we spend all of our life on cruise control or that we spend all of our life at Disney World. His purpose is that we will become conformed to Christ and that's encouraging because to know that there's a purpose for things gives us hope. I mean, one of the ways the Nazis used to destroy the minds of Jewish captives in the concentration camps is they would have these big dump trucks come in and dump big piles of sand at one end of the yard where they worked. They would have the men take shovels and they would have handheld like big wheelbarrows and they'd take the sand and put it in the wheelbarrow and they'd run it down to the other end of the concentration camp and dump

it, and when they had done all of that, then they'd go down and take all these piles of sand they just put there and put them in wheelbarrows and take them back to the other end. They would keep doing that day after day after day until men lost their minds or lost their will to live. It was senseless. "Why are we doing this? They're just trying to kill us." Well, sometimes you can feel like, "God, you're trying to kill me." What was it that Job said at the bottom of the barrel of pain, so to speak? He cried out to the Lord and said, "Even if you kill me, I will still love you. Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him."

So there are times when in the midst of our hard times when we're looking up from the bottom having broken clear through, God has a purpose. I can't see how this aiding that purpose but I want to believe my God. I don't want to believe how I feel. I don't want to believe how I process circumstances because our process, our way of processing can be all off. Have you ever analyzed something and got it wrong? Sure, if you've been alive more than five weeks. You've analyzed things and got them wrong and so often we analyze, "Well, this would be best for me. Why doesn't God give this to me? Or why doesn't God take this away from me?" Because he's processed it and this is the better answer for you.

So the first thing we want to look at in our current situation is God has an eternal sovereign purpose and he's working it out. All things are working together which is taking my next point, the eternal predestination, the sovereign predestination of God in our circumstances. "For those whom he foreknew, he predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son." Now I've gone to people early in my experience of being a young Calvinist, so to speak, when if you mentioned the "E" word or the "P" word, people would go ballistic. The veins in their neck would bulge. The veins on the side of their head would bulge. Their face would turn red and they'd yell at you. It's really hard to dialog and have a conversation with people who are yelling at you over the "E" word and the "P" word. Some of you may have had that same experience. Some of you may have done that to others before the Lord graciously opened your eyes.

Predestination. "Oh, I don't believe that's true. We'd all be just a bunch of robots." I'm curious, I've taken a poll for years and so far it's 100%. How many of you are so obedient, so incredibly careful and conscientious that you never rebel, never do your own thing, you're just always a slave to the will of God? Would all of you please stand up. Let the tape note that no one is standing up. And people say, "Well, if predestination is true, you become a robot," they don't know Christian experience and they don't know our God. Certainly the sovereignty of God and human responsibility are both taught and how they come together, I don't know. Spurgeon had the clever remark, "You don't reconcile friends, you just get along with both of them." And the Bible teaches both and I don't worry about it. But the eternal predestination of God. God purposed to save us. He purposed to save us to become like Christ. He purposed all this so that we would know him as Jesus knows him.

You know, one of the things about John's Gospel I like is in John's Gospel John, so to speak, picks the curtain and pulls it back and says, "Would you like to know what's going on in the Godhead before Jesus came to earth?" So John's Gospel says this is the kind of

stuff that's going on before Jesus came to earth. The Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world, the Lamb who was sent here on an errand of mercy.

This third point, predestined is the choosing of God beforehand to guarantee all the details that would work out your salvation. God has already chosen beforehand all the details that will work out for your salvation, work out for your own good. To predestine means to mark off beforehand; to mark off and to choose. You know, I can't believe that people get upset about God about the doctrine of predestination. Think about it. Let's say you're going on a trip this summer on vacation or you've been on a vacation before, did you say, "Well, I've got a credit card, a full tank of gas, and we'll let the Spirit lead and we'll just take off and see where the car goes." And you went around the block eight times and you came home frustrated. I mean, nobody goes on vacation that way. I mean, that's ludicrous. It's not even a great illustration but it does work, but the point is this: if we think things through, "Okay, where are we going to stop?" In the old days when you had a AAA trip tick or the new days you punch in your GPS where you want to go, it says, "Well, you can stop here. There's gas stations here. There's restaurants here. There's an amusement park here. Here's all the things between here and where you say you want to go." It tells you what to do and you can plan ahead. You don't just wing it. We're all not closet charismatics and as the Spirit leads and kind of leading an undisciplined, unfocused life, but rather we plan things out.

Is it okay for the sovereign Almighty God to handpick all the details that would make for your salvation and your sanctification to make you like Christ? That's exactly what predestination means. God has already chosen everything that would make for your best interest; that would make sure that you make it to glory. I like the way that J. C. Ryle, the 19th century English Reformed author and preacher said, "Every single molecule in the universe is working according to God's sovereign plan to get you to heaven." Every single molecule in the universe is working to get you to heaven and that's encouraging. Everything serves God's purposes. Everything.

"And those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called, he also justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified." The Bible says that you're already as good as in heaven because in verse 30 it says that in predestinating you to become conformed to the image of his Son, he has laid out all the details and he's made sure that you're going to make it. He called you, he justified you, and it says here he glorified you. Now it's in the past tense, the same way as the other ones. He predestinated you before time. In time he called you. In time he justified you. And it says he's glorified you. Because salvation is up to our God and not up to us, it's a done deal that you're going to make it to heaven. Not because you're the brightest bulb in God's pack. Not because you're the most disciplined Christian. Not because you're reading more Bible verses than everybody else. But God himself will see to it that you make it to heaven. He's predestined all the details on the trip. He's marked it out so what's best for you.

Now, it was a realization for me that all of our paths are not the same in the sense that God has had my wife and I on a path over the years and looking back over the years of our marriage, we were married in 1972. We were only 6 but we were very mature. No,

we've been married a long time, 46 years in September. Now, God has worked out his sovereign purposes in our lives. It hasn't been exactly the same journey you were on but he is making us like Christ. He is seeing to it that we will get to glory. He's marked out all the details, the ones I would have never chosen in a thousand years, and the ones that I was eager to accept. He's marked it all off and he's doing the same for you. If there had been a better plan for your life, God would have had you on that other plan. If there had been a better path for your life, God would have had you on that other path. He's marked it all off. Even your stumblings and your fumbings, your mistakes, your sins, your errors of judgment. God was not caught off-guard. He wasn't going, "Whoa! I never thought about that. How am I going to make it up for this knuckle-head?" Never a problem. All of the things in your life were marked off by God because his goal is to make you like Christ and to see to it that you get to heaven.

I apologize again at the fact that I can't see my own notes but I do know my own message so we'll move on to my third point. God has an eternal purpose and he's going to fulfill that purpose. You're going to be saved to be conformed to the image of his Son. He will take you to heaven with the moral image of Christ. You're not going to physically look like Christ but morally you will be like Christ. He has an eternal sovereign predestination at work. He's working out all the details of your life. He's choosing what's best for you. And finally, close to that is the eternal sovereign providence of God in our circumstances. You may be listening to what I'm saying and the question is: will you believe it? Do you believe it? You're saying, "God, I believe your word is true. I believe you're bigger and smarter and wiser and better and gooder than I am and so I trust you." You can say that. You go, "Well, I don't know. The jury is still out." If you have the mindset right now the jury is still out, then you have a real problem because if you can't move forward and trust in God, you're not going to make it very far because you are going to have issues in your life that God's going to choose for you that you're not going to like and the question is if you say, "God, you take a hike. I'm going to take over because I know best." Then you're in a really bad situation. You're in a really scary situation.

The providence of God accomplishes God's eternal purpose by making me like Christ and that means to work out all the circumstances, hard and soft, good and bad. Romans 8:28, "All things work together for the good." It doesn't say they are good but all things work together for the good. Evil things happen to Christians. Evil things happen to you and to me. Wicked things. Sinful things. And we don't want to look too pious because we do them to other people sometimes. We sin against other people. How can our God possibly work through this? All things work together for the good.

The great thing about being a Christian when you really read the Bible and think about who God is, is that our God can take the worst things that ever happened in all of human history and work them out for the greatest good of the greatest number of people and for his own glory. How in the world do all things work together for good? Well, like pieces in a puzzle. You know, some people like to work puzzles. I'm not one because I like projects you can nail in a weekend, not something that takes six or eight weeks or six or eight months and one piece at a time you put it there. But if you're a puzzle worker, you can imagine one of my heroes was Ron Dunn who pastored at MacArthur Boulevard

Baptist church in Irving, Texas for many years and was a great Christian man and preacher and leader, and he talked about he and his wife had one of those humongous puzzles that you spend weeks and months on, and they got it all put together finally and they were one piece missing and you may go, "That's my life. I knew it. There's a piece missing." And it may work out for Ron and Kay Dunn, they missed a piece of their puzzle. There are no pieces of the puzzle missing in terms of God's way of building your life. He knows exactly what he's doing. He didn't forget anything. He didn't overlook anything. Nothing came along that was too strong for him so he had to give it up. Everything is working out.

The word "providence" comes from the Latin "provideo, to see beforehand and make the necessary plans." To see beforehand. Take Exhibit A, after the Lord Jesus Christ the greatest example of the sovereignty of God and our providence is Joseph in the Old Testament, and if you haven't read Genesis recently, let me give you the short version. He's the favorite son of his father. His other brothers are jealous. They become so jealous they hate him. They decide they're going to fake his death or kill him, but they said, "You know, if we fake his death and sell him to the Amalekite slave traders, we'll make money off him and we're rid of him. So it's a twofer, we get rid of the guy and we make money." So they fake his death. They tell his father that he was killed by wild animals. They've sold him to Amalekite slave traders after they had dropped him in a pit and spent some time debating what to do with him and he got to listen over here some of their debate about what to do with him. If you've ever seen the movie about Joseph, it's a very moving scene as he's crying out to them from the bottom of this pit and they could care less. They just want to get rid of him. That's ugly.

Then he's sold to these Amalekite slave traders, whether Amalekites or Americans or whoever the slave traders were, they're not known for being gracious. He's taken to Egypt and he's sold into slavery to an Egyptian and ancient records show that the Egyptians despised the Hebrews. They wouldn't eat with Hebrews. They wouldn't socialize with Hebrews. And if Hebrews worked for them, they were only slaves and lived out in the slave quarters. But somehow Potiphar, this high ranking Egyptian official, saw something in Joseph and took him and brought him as a slave and then brought him into his house and let him eat at his table and treated him like a son. That's amazing.

Then Potiphar's wife had designs on him and he wouldn't deny his God and despise his master by committing adultery with Potiphar's wife so he spurned her and she was viciously angry that he would have nothing to do with her. So she created a story that he had come on to her and attacked her and told her husband what he had tried to do and so her husband had no choice but to have him arrested and put in jail. You know, no jail is ever fun but I'm not sure that jails 1000 BC were fun places to be in Egypt, particularly if you were a Hebrew, and here he is in this prison but in God's providence he just happens to meet a baker and a cup-bearer and one of them gets out and tells the king, the pharaoh, about Joseph and his ability to read dreams. He brings Joseph out and Joseph interprets the reality of the dream and saves the day for the Egyptian empire and he's made Prime Minister of Egypt.

That's the short version. Took what? Two minutes? That was 17 years of his life. He was 14 when he was sold into slavery. Fourteen. He was 31 when he finally was brought into the light as the great man that he was and made Prime Minister of Egypt, number two only to the pharaoh. Seventeen years. I can remember preaching through Genesis like it was yesterday and grieving over what it would be like to go through 17 years of misery like that and to be mistreated, misunderstood, despised, cut off from your family. Your own family sold you into slavery. Your own family wanted you dead and gone. Your father thinking you're dead. Being a member of a despised race in a foreign country.

God has his purposes. Now, let me give you some verses to think about. If you look at Genesis 45, or take my word, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, one of the more poignant scenes in the whole Bible. They didn't recognize him. Egyptians wore different clothes, they hadn't seen their brother in 17 years, they had beards, he was clean shaven, he wore an Egyptian headdress and probably some Egyptian makeup and he didn't look anything like the little kid brother they sold 17 years ago. Then when he dismisses everyone and he reveals himself to them and to use a contemporary phrase, they're blown away. "Oh, my God, what has happened? It's doom time for us! Our brother is the Prime Minister of Egypt and he's going to take care of us." Well, listen to what Joseph says and he says it three times. I think he says it three times because we're slow learners and he didn't repeat it for his own sake. In verse 8 of chapter 45, he said, "God sent me before you here to preserve life." Then in verse 7, "And God sent me before you to preserve a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors." In other words, "God sent me here. Egypt's going to have food. Egypt's going to have plenty when there's a famine in the Middle East and your families are going to come here and they're going to find food and they're going to be saved and God's promoted me in order that many people might be saved." Then again in verse 8, "So it was not you who sent me here but God." Here's the idea: yes, these men really did do what they did. God didn't make them do it, so to speak. "I wanted to be nice to my brother but God made me mean." I don't think any of the boys here can try that on their parents, "I wanted to be nice to my brother and my sister but God made me mean." I don't think that's going to work. You can try it but if you get a spanking, don't blame it on me.

"Okay, so God sent me here. Yes, he used you. He used your sinful impulses, your sinful desires, your hatred of me, your despising of God, your despising of our father," all the different sins that they committed in what they did, "but ultimately God was using it," because ultimately motive determines whether or not something's good or bad. They had evil motives and God says, "Thank you. I will use your evil motives for the good of my servant, my beloved Joseph." Only a sovereign, holy, omniscient and loving God like our God can take evil motives, evil plans and evil intents and work them out for good.

In fact, later when Jacob dies, the brothers have another relapse and they say, "Oh man, dad's dead. Joseph's gonna clean house now. He's gonna kill all of us. Oh, why couldn't dad live longer because he's dead and he's not here to protect us from Joseph." And Joseph has to reassure his brothers, "I know our father is dead. I have no plans to hurt you." Again this is what he says, "As for you, you did mean evil against me but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are

today." His whole extended family, the future of the Jewish people, was based upon God sovereignly working in the wickedness of Joseph's brothers to accomplish good, holy and grand purposes.

Now, I'll wrap up here in the next minute or two. So what is the purpose of God's eternal providence? What's the purpose of it? Well, it provides for every possibility in life. There is no detail, no contingency, again no molecule in the whole universe that isn't a part of God's plan. God had the Amalekite slave traders at just the right time came by. What a coincidence. "We're thinking about killing him, but hey, these slave traders are here. We can sell him into slavery." That wasn't a coincidence. Again, ancient history and archaeology tell us that the Egyptians despised Hebrews but this one man, Potiphar, liked something he saw in Joseph and took him into his home, treated him well, treated him as a son and let him eat at his table. God just happened to have two high ranking officials that worked with pharaoh in the jail with him so they could see his ability to interpret dreams and one of them got out and told pharaoh. Gee, what a coincidence. There are no coincidences. God knows what he's doing.

But not only does it provide for every eventuality in life, it protects you from every enemy of your life. Joseph's brothers wanted to kill him but decided at the last minute to sell him into slavery. They couldn't kill him. Potiphar's wife wanted to defile Potiphar's bed and to shame Joseph and his God but God wouldn't let Joseph do that. The Egyptian person that was in prison that was meant to punish Joseph became a place where it was from the prison to the palace. Joseph's enemies could not destroy him. Our sovereign God makes his enemies, makes your enemies and my enemies into tools. Even Satan can't hurt us and can't touch us unless God gives him sovereign approval.

Go back and read the first two chapters of the book of Job. Satan has to ask God permission to do anything to Job and God says, "You can do this much but no farther," and that's exactly, Satan goes right to the end of that limitation and Job does not give up his faith in God, he does not curse God, does not defile God's name and finally Satan says, "Skin for skin." He's not stupid. I mean, you pay well. He serves you, you treat him well. "You take away, okay, we've taken away his kids. We've taken away his livelihood. We've taken away just about everything. Let me touch his body and he'll curse you to your face." God says, "I know what I'm doing. Do as much as you want to but you can't take his life." And Job is struck with these painful boils all over his body and he's in misery and he's scraping his skin with broken clay pots for some kind of measure and sitting in ashes, and it's a miserable scene. "Even if he kills me, yet will I hope in him." He does not curse God and at the end God blessed him with double of everything he had before. One person said, "Yeah, but he lost his 10 kids in that terrible tornado." Yes, but they were believers and they went to heaven and he got to keep them and he got 10 more on top of them so 10 of them you had to wait to see it until you got to heaven, and you got 10 more to replace them. God is no man's debtor.

What's the greatest calamity that's ever happened in the history of the world? What's the worst sin? And we usually think things are bad by we count the numbers. Well, six million Jews and 11 million African Americans were shipped from Africa over to the

States, and how many people died in the gulag in the Soviet Union. And we count up numbers and so we think the bigger the numbers, the worse it is but we all are sinners, even children are sinners. Who is the only sinless person ever to walk this planet? The Lord Jesus Christ. The greatest crime against humanity ever committed was the kangaroo court trial and execution of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only sinless person ever to walk this planet, and yet our sovereign God can take the worst thing that ever happened arguably and make it into the greatest source of good for the greatest number of people.

We think too often like the devil that God cannot triumph in weakness, God cannot triumph when things seem to go bad. What did the disciples think when Jesus Christ was taken to the cross? "This is terrible! All of our plans! We thought he was Mr. Big. We thought he was the Messiah. It's all coming crashing down!" Yes, he was the Messiah but he wasn't a Messiah who was going to be a political leader, he wasn't going to stand around like some general with his foot on the neck of his enemies, he's going to be suffering Savior and he's going to save by weakness, so to speak. He is going to become a suffering servant. He's going to become a sacrificial lamb and the sins of all of his people for all time will be placed on him.

So in our economy, we think it was a failure, but only having been raised from the dead do we see this is part of God's eternal plan. The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man. The weakness of God is stronger than the strength of man. Our God can take everything that happens and work it for your good and his glory. "All things work together for the good of those who love God, those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." That's his purposes today, that's his purposes for you every day until you get to glory.

Let's pray.

Our Father and our God, we thank you that we serve a real God not a pretend god, not a god like us but a little bit bigger, but the real God, the sovereign God, the omniscient, all-knowing God, the omnipotent, all-powerful God, the loving God who would give his own Son for us, the holy, holy, holy God who never makes moral errors and never does anything sinful. We thank you that you are in control of our lives, you're in control of this church, you're in control of all that happens to all of your people and you're accomplishing your holy purposes. We thank you by faith and ask that you would help us to believe what your word says and not what circumstances seem to be like or what appear to be like and not how our fallen human minds might process them, but according to what your word says for it is the truest thing we will ever know. Help us to trust you, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.