

Sermon 18: Wisdom and God's Providence

Proverbs 16:1-33 The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established. The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished. By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil. When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right. A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. A just weight and balance are the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag are his work...³³The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

Purpose: The purpose of this section is to give Godly wisdom in the context of God's providence.

Proposition: God wants you to rest in His providence.

Interrogative: How can I do that?

Section 1: We need to understand the mystery of God's providence:

- **God's Sovereignty defined: God's sovereignty is His right to rule as He sees fit all that He has created. Colossians 1:16-17** By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: **all things were created by him, and for him:** And he is **before all things, and by him all things consist. Daniel 4:34-37** I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and **I blessed the most High**, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, **whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:** And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and **he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand**, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose **works are truth, and his ways judgment:** and those that walk in pride **he is able to abase.**
- **God's Providence defined: God's providence is the way He chooses to personally govern as the sovereign. Colossians 1:17** And he is before all things, and by him all things consist...**Romans 11:25-36** **I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits;** that blindness **in part** is happened to Israel, **until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.** And so all Israel shall be saved...**ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.** For **God hath** concluded them all in unbelief, **that he might have mercy upon all.** O the depth of the riches both of the **wisdom** and **knowledge** of God! **how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding**

out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things...

- **Our limitations exposed: The ways of God's providences are guided by unlimited knowledge, infinite wisdom, and good purposes.**
- **The best example in the Bible: The cross... Acts 2:22-24** Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being **delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God**, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Man's Limited Knowledge:

- Pilate is spineless and unjust.
- The mob is full of illogical rage.
- The Roman soldiers are killing an innocent man.
- The punishment is vicious and inappropriate.
- Jesus' ministry was cut off too soon.
- People who could have been healed were not.
- Satan got the victory.
- The religious leaders abused their authority and got away with it.

God's infinite Wisdom:

- His love is being demonstrated
- His patience is being demonstrated
- His grace is being demonstrated
- His humility is being demonstrated
- The seriousness of sin is being demonstrated
- God's justice is being fully satisfied
- Salvation is fully purchased
- You and I are the beneficiaries of this event.
- God's forbearance before judgment is being demonstrated.

Section 2: We need to understand the following guiding principles related to God's providence:

Truth 1: Wisdom understands that God governs the hearts of men: 16:1 The preparations [planning process] of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD...

All the various factors, that influence our innermost thoughts are guided by the invisible hand of God to move us in the direction He ultimately wants us to go.

- **For positive ends:**
 - Joseph in Egypt preserves God's people
 - Daniel in Babylon rises in spite of oppositions
 - Ruth in Bethlehem marries into the line of Christ

- Esther in the palace preserves God's people
- Nehemiah before the King rebuilds Jerusalem
- Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah repent in humility
- **For negative ends:**
 - Pharaoh before Moses hardens his heart
 - The Canaanites before the children of Israel hardened their hearts
 - Nebuchadnezzar toward Jerusalem sought its destruction
 - Israel toward the Messiah rejected Him

Truth 2: Wisdom understands that God evaluates the motivations of men: 16:2 All the ways of a man are clean [pure] in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth [ponders] the spirits...

- God understands not only what we do, but why we do it, what would happen if, and all the various nuances of the decisions that we make.
- He takes into account all these details as He works in circumstances and when He executes justice.
- The what if's that plague us never plague God. They are simply some of the factors that He considers in the way He works.

Truth 3: Wisdom understands that trusting in God's sovereignty is the only way to have peace of mind in a troubling world: 16:3 Commit [roll onto] thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established [stable]...

Psalms 37:1-8 Fret not thyself because of evildoers, **neither be thou envious** against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. **Trust in the LORD, and do good**; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. **Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.** And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. **Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.**

- **Command 1: Don't worry.**
- **Command 2: Don't envy.**
- **Command 3: Trust God.**
- **Command 4: Do what He says is right.**
- **Command 6: Have a God-centered worshipful life.**
- **Command 7: Trust Him to shape your heart's desires.**
- **Command 8: Submit your plans to His plans and enabling.**
- **Command 9: Be patient through the seasons of process.**

Truth 4: Wisdom understands that God has a purpose for everything He allows, and will move people and circumstances to their appropriate ends: 16:4 The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil...

The idea is that God is directing everything and everyone to their appropriate corresponding end.

The example of Haman in the book of Esther

- **This is not teaching that God tempts people so they will sin, but rather that no matter how people respond to God's rule, they will one day give glory to Him.**
- **God is not the author of sin, though He may choose not to limit temptation: James 1:13** Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man...
- **God will not allow the believer to be tempted above His ability to resist and have victory: The believer will see all things work together for good: Romans 8:28-29** And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son...
- **The unbeliever who has rejected God's patience will reveal God's righteousness in perfect justice: Romans 2:5-6** After thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds...

Truth 5: Wisdom understands that no one will escape God's justice: 16:5 Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished...

- **This Proverbs is logically linked to the one before it.**
- **God's ways can be resisted and often are resisted by coordinated opposition, but this partnership in evil cannot stop God's final say on the matter.**
- **God will always get the last word.**

Truth 6: Wisdom understands that no situation is beyond God's ability to work out and through: 16:7 When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him...

- This Proverbs is meant to comfort us and challenge us to simply do the right things, when we are being dealt with unfairly.
- God has the ability, and does in His own way, vindicate His people and bring peace to their conflicting circumstances.

Truth 7: Wisdom understands that God moves our decisions to accomplish both His secret and revealed purposes: 16:9 A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps...

- This is ultimately a bookend to the Proverb stated at the beginning of the chapter.
- Both Proverbs emphasize that while people make decisions based upon internal deliberation, God is ultimately the one who directs where people go and is influencing the decision making process often through factors that are outside of our control.

Truth 8: Wisdom understands that God's ways are always just: 16:11 A just weight and balance are the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag are his work...

- God's ways are just.
- All legitimate human justice is only a meager reflection of the perfect justice of God.

- If we could see the whole picture as God sees it, then we would be able to see that what He does is always right. Since we are limited in what we are able to see, and even process what we have seen, we often do not understand His justice.

Truth 9: Wisdom understands that our decisions for good or for evil have consequences and are significant: 16:12-25 It is an **abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right. The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it. In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favor is as a cloud of the latter rain.** How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver! **The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul. Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.** Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. **He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he.** The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning. Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly. **The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death...**

- While God is sovereign, and is involved in even the little details of the decisions we make and the ultimate outcomes we experience, we need to realize that He has given us legitimate yet limited freedom, and the decisions we make are significant and really impact ourselves and the people around us for good or for bad.

Truth 10: Wisdom understands that no human decision will ultimately throw off God's purposes: 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD...

- **We plan, we labor, we decide, and we act...BUT**
- **The ultimate outcome of our plans, labors, decisions, and actions are in the hands of the Lord.**

Section 3: Peace of mind because of God's providence:

- **When I am overwhelmed:** I need to remember that God is in control and He is taking all the little details of the circumstances that I am facing and weaving them together to accomplish His good purposes.
- **When I am mistreated:** I need to remember that God is in control and will limit the extent of the injustices I face, He will give me the means to endure these injustices, He will turn the situation around in His own way and own time for His glory and my good, and in the end He will vindicate me and judge those who have caused injustice.
- **When I am praying:** I need to remember that God's hands are personally involved in the very details that move the hearts of men and influence the ultimate outcomes of their decisions.

- **When I am burdened for people:** I need to remember that God's timing and ours are not always in sync. He is able to do things that we cannot do, and therefore we need to trust Him to work in ways that only He can.
- **When I am afraid:** I need to trust in His goodness, power, and ultimate purposes.
- **When I feel I cannot change:** We need to remember that it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.