

God Over You

Building a Christian Mind

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I view it as my God-given responsibility these days to commit felonious assault on the mindset of the existing evangelical church. That's why we've been doing this series for the entire year, "Building a Christian Mind." That's why we'll be doing it for a few more months still to come. I want you to understand that the stakes are enormously high and that we are not trying to swim downstream with common thought prevailing among those that call themselves Christians. We believe that those who call themselves Christians are the predominant problem in the world today and because of that, we have to address it and address it clearly, directly, and boldly. There is no other option. The modern church has deluded millions and millions and millions of people for decades and decades now with its misrepresentations of the nature of God, the nature of man, the nature of sin, the nature of Christ, the nature of the gospel, the nature of repentance, the nature of faith, and it has conditioned generations to have wrong presuppositions about what it means to be a Christian and therefore what to expect from the nature of the Christian life. And as people come, and I'm just so very grateful that the Lord has brought all of you here today, and not just here today, but, you know, so many of you to be an ongoing part of our church; it's a real blessing to my heart, as I said on Tuesday, such a blessing to have people gather around that really want the word of God rather than programs and entertainment in their church experience. That's a blessing to me and it's a great encouragement to me and the hundreds of you that come week by week and Tuesday by Tuesday, you have no idea how important and crucial you are to my own life and encouragement in these particular days in which we live and so, I speak as to friends here, but I speak with urgency as well. Because the church has deluded so many millions for so many decades, we have, we speaking as broadly the church, the evangelical church, broadly speaking, have entirely false expectations about the nature of Christian life and what should happen and what will happen if we are Christians and if we walk with Christ, and because we have false expectations, we order our prayers entirely wrongly, we view ourselves as being essentially okay, not having any real major defects, just needing some help from God and a little bit of help from Christ to boost us into heaven, but that we have this idea that we are fundamentally okay, we're fundamentally righteous, and if we just live in a fundamentally righteous way, and in a morally respectable way, that life will go the way that we want it to, and God will be obligated to come alongside and help us and give us what we want when things don't go the way that we desire. If I am moderately religious, life will go well with me, and my kids will be cute and obedient, and they will all become Christians as well, and when I want somebody to become a Christian, that person will

become a Christian without fail, and we just have an entirely wrong mindset about the world in which we live. We live in a world that is under a curse because of the fall of Adam, and we shared in that fall of Adam. He was our representative of all of humanity, and when he fell, the world fell under a curse and therefore, we live in a world where the ground produces weeds and thistles instead of being easy to till, that being a symptom of the curse under which we live. And we all have this sense that we would never admit, that we probably wouldn't even recognize, but we all have this sense that I'm going to be the exception and not really be weighed down by those things. You know, everything's going to go well with my family, and everything's going to go well in my realm no matter what happens, and all of the evil and problems are out there rather than those that affect me. Well, as many of you are finding in your own life and in your own sorrows, you're realizing, that's not the way it is, and so the presuppositions that you've been conditioned to believe from the prevailing evangelical mindset over the past 50 years, since Bill Hybels rose to prominence in Willow Creek, is to make you think that God exists to help you and make everything go okay. And that's not true. That is not true, and the sooner that we demolish the foundation of that false philosophy and it collapses, the better it will be for everybody, even though it's going to be very painful in the process to let that happen. And I would hardly be a faithful pastor to you if I wasn't mindful of the deep sorrows that so many of you are going through and give you a perspective that would help you process this and to realize that you're not crazy, that you're not, you know, that God's not being unfair or different with you, and to help you see that that mirage that has been created by others over decades is just precisely that, it's a mirage. And you get there, you get to where you think, it's palm trees and water, a shady oasis to drink quietly and pleasantly from, you get there and you find out this is just a desert. There's nothing here.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his book, "Truth Unchanged, Unchanging," on page 105, said this, and it kind of helps set the context for what I want to say here. It says, "We all have the fatal habit of pinning our hopes to something that is going to happen." We all have the fatal habit of pinning our hopes to something that is going to happen. "We hope that things are going to get better. We hope that we're going to be healthy. We hope that we're going to be prosperous. We hope that there's not going to be any major problems in our families. We hope for this or we hope for that, and when there are difficulties, we're pinning our hopes that God will change that to our liking during our earthly lifetime. That's the way people live. That's just how it is. Now, you may not like getting the reality of the way that you think exposed like this, but let's just deal with the fact that that is how we think, that is what we want, and as a result of that, that trajectory and mindset and set of presuppositions takes you in an entirely different trajectory away from biblical thinking and biblical living and that's why we must have a biblical mind developed within us in order to process these things rightly.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones' grandson, Christopher Catherwood, has written a number of books about his grandfather and he says this in a different book. He said, "Many of those who knew Martyn Lloyd-Jones and were helped by him, were able to say that what often helped the most was that he was able to teach them how to think and to do so biblically. This meant that when something arose in their life years later, when they no longer had

him as their pastor, they were able to use the methodology of thinking through what the Scripture said about the problem and work out from there what they should do."

We have to be able to think biblically, and nothing about the prevailing sentiment in the evangelical church for 50 years has taught us to do so, and so what we do, instead of thinking biblically, instead of living biblically and realistically, we live by false hopes, driven by false theology that is fueled by false motives, even as we do so with an air of outward spiritual respectability. And so we think, I will be healthy. I will be prosperous. I will be happy. I will be fulfilled. My kids will be cute. My kids will be obedient. My loved ones will become Christians. My loved ones will love me and be close to me forever. None of that is promised to us in the word of God. None of it is but until you're willing to forsake those things and embrace what biblical truth is, and to embrace what we'll see today as the central biblical principle by which you should order your life, as long as you're clinging to these things and thinking that somehow you're entitled to them, or that God has promised them to you, you will live in a fantasy world, number 1; secondly, when things start to go wrong, you'll wonder if maybe I've sinned, why is God upset with me; or thirdly, you'll start to blame the people around you and find fault in the systems or the organizations or the people that are around you and become a great big pain in the neck to them, all because you are operating on a false premise and false presuppositions about the whole way that life is going to go and is supposed to exist. I do want you to understand that I am assaulting, I am assaulting the very fundamental ways that most Christians think about life. This is a colossal collision of monumental proportions that I am making here this morning. We have a fantasy that we live in a world where our desires will determine the outcome. I want it to be nice and so it will be nice in the end. You know, then the name it, claim it philosophy, you know, you just speak into existence the reality that you want it to be as if we were sovereign over things. It's ridiculous. We live in that fantasy rather than taking seriously the reality that the world in which we live in is cursed, that life is expected to be difficult eventually, if not right now, and that life will come with many disappointments that are grievous and difficult, whether it's on a superficial, circumstantial level or at the most profound levels of relationships and affections that we have, all of those things being rooted in a prevailing mindset that is simply just not biblical and that's why this series we've been doing is so critical and so needed and is not yet done and, beloved, it's why we need the doctrine of divine providence to be clear and articulated in our minds.

Among other things, the doctrine of divine providence will help us live according to truth rather than according to our fantasies and, beloved, rather than, and this is just so fundamental, this is the difference between taking off in an airplane that's pointed east versus a plane that is pointed west. It takes you in completely different directions. Either we will live our lives by pinning our hopes on what we want to be true in the future, when maybe your spouse won't change and maybe your kids won't become Christians, and maybe your financial difficulties will never turn around, and instead of pinning your hopes on those things that may or may not happen – I know what it's like to have profoundly disappointed hopes, this is one of the reasons why I'm so animated about it – instead of pinning our hopes on what may or may not happen and what has not been promised to us in the word of God, what you and I need to do is we need to live our lives

according to the reality of Scripture that has been laid out before us and what the nature of reality actually is and the course that things will actually follow. The world does not bend to your desires or mine. I mean, even our loved ones don't bend to our desires when they get old enough to have their own independent thinking and we can't shield ourselves from this by creating a little bubble in which we live, controlling every possible external influence. Sooner or later, sooner or later, the world crashes in and you're not in control anymore, and then what? And then what? Who are you going to blame? Who's going to bear the brunt of your disappointment and fear? Your fear and your disappointment.

Look, I could stand up here and be all sugary today and try to be real relational and all of that, but you know what? Churches that do that for you are a dime a dozen. They are a dime a dozen. At some point, we need to let the truth speak to us and respond to the truth and get serious and sober about the nature of biblical reality. And among other things, this will help us all live according to truth rather than our fantasies and the problem is, and the reason that I've spent so much time and reordered the order of service on this today is this: the problem that those of you gathered here today that are sympathetic to the ministry and for whom I give thanks to God, the problem is, is that without even realizing it, you're not really hearing the truth because you are processing it through entirely wrong presuppositions about what life should be and what you want life to be. You know, we're not going to order things according to the politics that we want and like. We're not going to be able to order things so that everything goes according to plan and we're comfortable and, you know, our neighbors stay on their side of the fence and all of that. That's not life and the question is, what are we going to do about it? And more importantly, what would God have us do about it? But when you have wrong presuppositions controlling your thinking and thinking that it should be okay, it should be comfortable, this is what God wants, when that's controlling your thinking, then even when you're sitting under the word of God, you're processing it in a way that means that you're missing the whole point. And so, yeah, I'm going to continue my effort to commit felonious assault on the mindset that prevails in the broader evangelical church, as long as God gives me strength to do it.

Now, with that said, we all know the Scripture that says, in Romans 8:28, that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose, Romans 8:28, and that's kind of a framing consideration and principle going forward through the remainder of today's message, but understand, beloved, that God's going to define what's good by his standard, by his wisdom, by what he decreed before eternity began, what his purposes were in creation, and what his long-term eternal goals are to conform you to the image of Christ; not to give you a pain-free existence here on earth, but to conform you to the image of Christ where you are in a position and you are fit to give glory to him throughout all of eternity and where you have learned not to love this world so much and to have your hopes pinned in this world and relationships in this world to the exclusion of the glory of God and being conformed to the image of Christ. Look, you don't have to be a Christian, you do not have to be a Christian at all to want your relationships to be happy, for your family to be harmonious, for your business to be prosperous and to be comfortable in life. You don't have to be a Christian to want that and if God is going to work things according to his purpose and according to his ideas

that are good, then what we may find is that our desires are disappointed, that the things that we hoped for are withheld from us with a greater spiritual goal in mind that you would be weaned from your love for this world, you would be delivered away from that, of loving that which is passing and temporal, because here we have no lasting city. We have no lasting city here, beloved. That's what Scripture says in the book of Hebrews. That's not what we're even seeking as true Christians. That's not even what we're after and so what we have to be mindful of is that the good that God works out and causes all things to work together for good is not according to our standard and our desires, but according to his wisdom and his eternal plan. And those two may not be the same. And so may the Lord soften and open our hearts for what we have in front of us now.

We've been surveying the doctrine of divine providence. We started that last week in our message, "God Over All," and what we said was is that divine providence is broad, covers everything in the universe, it's detailed down to the hairs on our head and when birds live and die, and that it's personal. It's personal. In fact, let's go back to where we left off in Psalm 139 to enter into Scripture here today. And just by way of reminder, Psalm 139:13 says, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." In other words, God had a sovereign plan for your life in place before you were conceived in your mother's womb. Jeremiah spoke about this in a personal way when the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, and in chapter 1, verse 5, said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." God telling Jeremiah, "I had a plan in place from all of eternity before I ever formed you in the womb. Now I'm calling you into that ministry, Jeremiah, that I've given to you, and now it is time for you to set out and embark upon it."

Now, what's true of Jeremiah individually, what we see from Psalm 139, generally speaking, is true of all of us. God has prepared a life for us to live and for some it may be an easy path, for some it may be very, very difficult. The challenge, the duty, the responsibility that we have is this, not to lust after, covet after the life that God has given to someone else, but rather to embrace the life that God has given to us individually and say, "God, now in light of the life that you have given me, how would you have me live? God, in light of the life that you have given to me, what shall I do from here going forward?" Beloved, you and I, we can't change anything about the past, what we have is today looking forward, and in light of all of your sins, all of your successes, all of your failures, whatever that mixture of things is, here's where you are today. Now what is the question? And the question is not, what do I hope will happen with my loved ones? What do I wish would change about the things around me? Forget all of that stuff. That's the wrong way to think if you don't first have the doctrine of divine providence established fully and greatly in your mind. If we're not thinking theologically about life, we're not thinking rightly at all. That's fundamental to building a Christian mind.

And so, let me repeat the definition that I've given you of divine providence. I ask you to write this down because in one sense, beloved, today's message, there's a sense in which everything that we've been doing since January 17th has been building up to this message today. There's a lot more to come, but this is so fundamental that we have spent seven months laying a foundation to be able to preach this one message. That was the plan all along. That's how important this is, because it goes to how we interpret life and what we do with it. in the days the Lord has given to us. So a definition of divine providence: God continually upholds his entire creation and sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his will. God continually upholds his entire creation, he sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens, he directs all creatures and events to accomplish his will. All creatures, all events to accomplish his will, and that's embedded in Romans 8:28 itself. He causes all things to work together for good. All things to work together for good. God has his arms around all of it, his infinite arms around the infinite complexity of an infinite universe and all of the infinite variations of life that come to us, he has his arms around all of it and somehow in a way that I don't pretend to understand, without forcing people to do things, he works through all of the free actions of men to direct it so it accomplishes exactly what he desires, all for his glory when it's all said and done, and all for your good in the end.

Now, let me just stop here, call a time out as it were, and just fundamentally lay on the table for your heart to answer this question within yourself. Do you believe that? Do you believe that? Do you believe that God upholds his entire creation? Do you believe that God sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens? Do you believe that he directs all creatures and events to accomplish his will? Yes or no? You either believe that or you don't. Some of you, sadly, have been conditioned to, you know, think that Satan is thwarting God's plan left and right, not realizing that the devil is God's devil. Beloved, providence is the way that God works out his eternal plan, and the Christian mind, many of you are here truly born-again believers, praise God for that, if you've been born again, then you are to develop a Christian mind and the Christian mind is increasingly aware of the fact that God has planned your life and he will accomplish his purpose. Your Christian mind is to become increasingly aware that God has planned your life and he will accomplish his purpose. That's the way that you think. That's the fundamental premise upon which all of life is built, that you think like that. God has planned it. God is working it out. He will achieve his purpose. And everything fits within that broad category of thought. But it's more than that, beloved. It's more than that. This is more than just a matter of thinking, although it is preeminently that. There is also the preeminent matter of the desires and affections of your inner man. How does your soul respond to that? How do your desires respond to that? It's not just that you think this way, beloved. I can change it this way and kind of adapt it to what we've been doing on Tuesdays, which if you haven't been coming on Tuesdays, I invite you to talk to anyone that's been attending on Tuesday, and they'll tell you how essential it is that you be there, how important what has been happening over the past several weeks is in what's happening. If you're neglecting that teaching and not even reviewing it, are you listening to it after the fact if you can't be here? That's not good. But let me say this about providence, and this is kind of where we're going for the rest of the day today, the

Christian heart, the Christian heart is increasingly satisfied with the fact that God has planned your life and that he will accomplish his will. We're aware of this intellectually. We're satisfied with it, even if it's not what we wanted to begin with. We're aware of it. We're satisfied with it.

I'm going to give you five ways in which this works out and I have never been asked to, probably for many good reasons, I've never been asked to teach a session or a class on preaching. I've never been asked to do that and that's fine. If I was an outside observer and saw the way that I preached and the way that you're supposed to preach and how I actually preach, I probably wouldn't invite myself either. That's all right. I can live with that. But today, you know, if there's 250 people in the room here, I have 250 preaching students in front of me. You're all becoming preachers today with an audience of one, yourself, the man in the mirror, the woman in the mirror. You need to learn how to preach to yourself in light of the doctrine of divine providence and that's what I want to teach you here today.

First of all, what does divine providence do to you? What does it do? Let me put it this way, what effect should the doctrine of divine providence have upon a believing heart? Whether you're here today happy, angry, dissatisfied, fearful, confident, doesn't matter. None of that matters. How we feel about anything does not matter here today at all. It's not important. The important thing is to understand the spiritual impact that the fact that God upholds his entire creation and works in everything that happens, how that is supposed to affect you in the depths of your inner man and it's utterly transforming. And as we go through these five principles, this is what you are to say to yourself as you walk through life, not just today, this is what you are to be preaching to yourself for the remainder of your days.

Point number 1, divine providence makes you, number 1, submissive in your adversity. Submissive in your adversity. Now, you're probably like me to one degree or another. My initial response to adversity is often to complain and grumble against it. That ain't good. I shouldn't be that way, especially having been a Christian as long as I am. I should know better. I should be better. I'm still growing in these things too. But submissive in your adversity, Number 1, beloved, if God truly upholds his entire creation and sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and directs all creatures to accomplish his will, if God is working out a purpose that will prove good to you in the end without fail in all of its details, then there's a conclusion that you have to draw from that. If we embrace that and we affirm what Scripture says to be true, then there is a momentum, there is a spiritual force that is unleashed on our hearts that we have to bend to and respond to because providence teaches us to yield to God in our adversity. Whatever the adversity is, beloved, I don't say this unsympathetically, but it really doesn't matter. This transcends individual lives, individual circumstances, individual sorrows. It's greater than all of that. These things were true before you were born, they're true now, they'll be true after you're gone. We're dealing with eternal principles here that are greater and more important than the matters that afflict us in everyday life and here's the way that you think about these things. If providence is true, and it is, then you look beyond your circumstances to see the God who ordained them for you. You look beyond your circumstances to see the God

who ordained them for you. Psalm 139, "You appointed my days before there was one of them. You know the number of hairs on my head. You know when a sparrow falls. God, you're aware of all of this. Your love, eternally established in the sacrificial, substitutionary death of Christ on the cross for me. Then I have to view everything in life in light of that and look beyond the circumstances to see and to worship the God who ordained them."

Turn to the book of Job, the book of Job, and you know the story. Job was a blameless man. Satan sought permission from God to try to discredit Job, and God granted to the devil the liberty to afflict Job in every conceivable way short of death. His sons and daughters were taken away from him. His immense prosperity taken away, all in a matter of a day. And his seven sons and three daughters, eating and drinking in their oldest brother's house, Job gets word that a great wind came, verse 19, chapter 1, came across the wilderness, struck the four corners of the house, it fell upon the young people and they're dead and the messenger says, "I alone have escaped to tell you." Job, Job, I know you woke up this morning a prosperous, blameless man. You woke up this morning in that condition and for reasons that you don't understand, it's all been taken away from you. You have no more wealth. You have no more children. It's all gone. Adversity had thundered down on his life in a totally unexpected and demonically inspired way.

How did Job respond? You know, when someone dies, you can't pin your hope on what's going to happen in the future with them, right? There are no more hopes about earthly outcomes, and that exposes what it is that we're going to hope in going forward, the way it should have been all along. What did Job do in his adversity? Verse 20, "Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground," and complained bitter? No, that's not what it says. He worshiped. He worshiped. "And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.'" He submitted to Yahweh in the midst of unspeakable affliction. In verse 22, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong."

Well, as you know, the story goes on. He worshiped God. Satan wasn't finished yet and so God gives permission to Satan to afflict him in a horrible physical way. He afflicts him with boils, painful boils, loathsome sores. Look at chapter 2 verse 7, "Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And [Job] took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes." What a miserable existence. What a miserable existence. No morphine, no penicillin, nothing to alleviate this except a broken piece of pottery to dig and scratch at the sores that were on his body. And what did Job do? Well, first, let's see what his wife said, speaking of Job having affliction. Here's his wife speaking, "his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.'" The one closest to him is tempting him to turn on his Creator and Redeemer. And what did Job say in all of this adversity? "But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

Beloved, there you go. There you go. The doctrine of divine providence calls on you, compels you, commands you, invites you to accept adversity from God's hand rather than rebel and complain against it. Look, I know, I know that this is touching us at the very nerve center of our being to be told from Scripture that providence tells us to accept adversity, not to rebel against it, but if God loves us, if God is wise, if God is sovereign and providentially directing everything to accomplish his purpose, how could we view everything in life in any other way? If God orders it, and he's a good and wise God, and he's the God of our salvation, and he chooses to give us adversity, where is the room to rebel and complain and cause problems over it? Where, I ask you? There is no such room. There is no such corner in the house for the believing heart.

Look over at 2 Corinthians 12. We kind of need to look at all of this in one big unit here today. What was true in the Old Testament, true in the New Testament as well. True in the patriarch Job, true in the Apostle Paul. Paul was suffering under an affliction of a thorn given to him in the flesh, probably a false teacher, satanically inspired, who was destroying the church at Corinth, someone coming in, teaching false doctrine, wreaking division upon the body, causing the church at Corinth to question their founding apostle, and the sorrow in 2 Corinthians was great on the heart of the Apostle Paul. And what does he say about it? Verse 7, Paul, having been to the third heaven and seeing things and hearing things that men aren't permitted to repeat, 2 Corinthians 12:7, he says this, "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me." God, take this away. God, take this away. God, take this away. Paul, no. Paul, no. Paul, no. Three times. But God supplied him not with the answer to the prayer as he constructed it and wanted it to be, with something else that's related to his eternal sanctifying purpose. Verse 9, "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" God, this hurts. God, I don't like this. God, I'm suffering. God, help me. Yes, you are in a position of weakness. I get that. I sympathize with you here today from the pulpit, beloved. I get that. But isn't it true that at the end of the day my sympathy from the pulpit doesn't help you at all? Maybe it helps you a little bit with a little bit of encouragement. It's nice to know that somebody understands and is with me but that sympathy doesn't give you really the power to live. It might help you take another step, but it's not an enduring power to live. And so sympathy from the pulpit doesn't in the end help you if it's divorced from an understanding of the way that you respond to divine providence. I can't help you with that, that's why you have to preach to yourself. And in verse 9, Paul goes on to say, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Paul says, "Here I am in all this adversity, satanically inflicted upon me, and I'm content."

What do we see from Job? What do we see from Paul? What do we see from Christ in Gethsemane? "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." What do we see from all of that? Beloved, write this down too, write this down too: in the midst of your trials and afflictions and adversity, beloved, it very

well may be that the purpose of God is not to satisfy you and to give you what you want in it; it very well may be the purpose of God not to grant you relief from that. The purpose of God is always higher, his ways are higher than our ways, his thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and God places a far greater premium on the sanctification of your soul than he does on the earthly ease with which you live in this brief window of time that he's given to us. So God's purpose may not be to satisfy you at all, it may be that he sent the affliction to sanctify you and to teach you not to love this world, but instead to lean on him and to love him more than you love life itself. And he may, beloved, withhold blessings from you. He may bring trials to wean your affections from the world, to teach you even to love Christ more than you love mother, or father, son, or daughter, or anything else, to love him with all of your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and it's not until the lesser things that we attach our affections to are removed from us that we are free to learn how to actually do that and to prove forth the reality that the love in our heart for Christ is the surpassing thing that we love most of all.

And so, in light of divine providence, my preaching students, here's the simple thing that you have to do in your affliction: your attitude toward God, the words that I suggest you audibly say to yourself as you're looking in the mirror, is, "Father, let your will be done, not mine. I submit. I submit. I accept this even though it's difficult. God, I pray that in this you would sanctify me, that you would do the work on my soul that you intend to do regardless of how the circumstances do or do not change." With different language and a different context, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, he said, "The one who responds to adversity in that way is on the high road to the blessing of God." Do you want the blessing of God or do you want earthly comfort? Sometimes those two things may be in conflict. The one who believes divine providence and truly belongs to Christ submits in adversity and says, "Yeah, Father, your will be done. That's what I want. My body's breaking down, your will, not mine be done. O God, you took a loved one from me, Father, your will be done. Let me kiss the rod that disciplines me," as Sarah Edwards said in the 18th century after Jonathan died. Kiss the rod. Submit in the adversity.

Secondly, a belief in divine providence for the believer makes you sincere in your obedience, not only submissive in your adversity, sincere in your obedience. You say to your soul, "Soul, adversity has come, you must submit to this. I must submit to this. I want to submit to this. Lord, help me to conform my desires to yours." Secondly, it makes you sincere in your obedience. Divine providence should make you a man or a woman of sincerity. We all have temptations that come our way. Young men, young women have their temptations. Us older folks, we have different, sometimes, temptations of different forms. But the bottom line is it's just temptation seeking to draw us into sin, away from love and obedience to Christ. Now when that temptation comes, someone might twist the doctrine of divine providence and say, "Well, God knew that I would be tempted. Here I am, and so I'm justified in giving in. Oh, you know, I'm not going to be too worried about holiness here, because after all, God orders all things, and I'm tempted, and he knows I'm weak, and blah, blah, blah." Well, let's get a shovel and clean out the stall from that mess and replace it with godly thinking shaped by the doctrine of divine providence. Beloved, here's the reality: God will hold you accountable, one day you'll give an account to him for the way that you respond to what is revealed in Scripture and

he's not going to tolerate an accusation, an insinuation that somehow he's responsible for you sinning because of the way the circumstances were ordered. That's not true.

You don't need to turn there, but in Ecclesiastes 12, the last two verses of that entire book, a philosophy of life really you could say, which is another way of saying building a Christian mind, a philosophy of life. Verse 13, "The end of the matter when all has been heard is this, Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." Your responsibility, living under the light of divine providence, is to fear the God who gave you life and has ordered your circumstances. Not to complain against it. Not to sin in the midst of it. Not to live carelessly in the midst of it. Not to love your family more than you love Christ. None of that! None of that! There's just so much in the stall that we need to shovel out of our minds so that our minds are a clean place where the Spirit of God can work in a sanctifying way. And so we respond to Scripture, we respond to the revealed commands of God rather than justifying sin.

The truth of the matter in divine providence when it comes to the temptations that you face is what's expressed in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation," none, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man and God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape so that you may be able to do it." I'm in a time of temptation, providence does not mean, "Oh, I get to indulge this." Providence means, "Somewhere there's a way of escape here that I can respond in a godly way. God, by your Spirit, help me to find it. Strengthen my heart by your Spirit to desire the escape, not the indulgence, so that I could live to your glory." And so you preach to yourself, my preaching students, you preach to yourself, "I'm in a time of temptation, but I know that God orders my life, and I'm going to honor him with the way that I respond to this, not indulge my carnal desires."

Thirdly, the doctrine of providence not only makes you submissive in your adversity and sincere in your obedience, you're no longer playing games, you're no longer content with an outward form of godliness that lacks the inner power, you're no longer content to make a visual display to the people of God while inside your actual heart is grating against the Spirit of God, against instruction, against correction, because you don't want anyone messing with you and no one's going to mess with you. That's not godly and we just need to be honest with ourselves to that effect. Submissive in adversity, sincere in obedience, thirdly, sanctified in your planning, makes you sanctified in your planning. Here's what I mean by that. Divine providence does not mean that we take a haphazard approach to life. Proverbs commends the wisdom of good planning. We're supposed to order our lives and plan things and consciously use the minds and the resources that God has given us to accomplish good, and we plan to do that. But, beloved, we're not the one who disposes of our plans. We don't get to determine the outcome. We get to make some plans, but we don't get to determine what the outcome of those plans are. And so, in a belief of divine providence, what you do is you make your plans and you set them apart, and you commit them to God, and you let him determine the outcome, thankful and submissive and grateful, no matter what it may be.

Look at James 4. James 4. We'll just read verses 13 through 15. "Come now," James 4:13, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.'" I've got a plan. I'm going to go to X place, I'm going to work there for a year, and according to my plan, I'm going to make this much profit and Scripture rebukes that presumptuous, untrusting attitude, that self-sufficient, self-reliant attitude. Verse 14, "you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'" And he's not merely saying that this is what should be the words that come out of your mouth; we've all known people that say, that just say that so flippantly. What James is cultivating and calling for is a heart that is truly submitted to the providence of God and truly from the heart says, "If the Lord wills, we'll do this," and the implication being, "If the Lord doesn't will, then we'll do something else." And that's okay, I don't have to so grasp my plans for the day or my plans for life that if I get a half hour distraction and I can't do the household duty that I had planned in that half hour, man, I'm thrown off for my day and wondering what's happening, and oh, and you fall apart. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. No. We make our plans, and then we adapt as providence directs us, and the course of the river of divine providence turns at a bend or goes straight; either way, we're just happy to go in the current of the providence of God. And part of trusting God is knowing that for his own good reasons, he may thwart even your good plans. In other words, your plans are subject to how God chooses to bring them to pass.

Look over at Acts 16 where you see another apostolic example of this. Sometimes we think of the Apostle Paul and he got everything he wanted, not like that at all and even Paul had to respond to providence leading him in different directions. Acts 16:6, "And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been," here it is, "having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them." God was providentially hindering them from their plans to take the gospel to other regions. And so, verse 8, "passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas," and then things continued from there.

Beloved, we have to hold our plans with light fingers. We have to be willing to let them go. Sometimes we have to be willing to let our loved ones go, through death or through relocation or through rebellion. It's not what we planned, it's not what we want, but we let it go, trusting God for the outcome. Proverbs 16:9 says, the mind "of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." We make our plans, we set it in motion, so to speak, even that's under the providence of God, but we set it in motion and then God steers where it goes.

And so you preach to yourself, my preaching students. You stand, you look at yourself in the mirror, you say, "I'm going to submit to God in this adversity. I'm going to trust him for it. I'm going to stop playing games of hypocrisy and be sincere in my obedience." And then when your plans are frustrated, rather than getting angry, whatever, you preach to yourself and you say, "This is okay. God orders my life according to his will." Daily plans, massive plans, a collapse of everything that you worked for in relationships, in

business, you know, you spent decades working out and then your health fails and you're reduced to a shell of what you thought you were going to be, an accident comes and you can no longer walk. Happens, doesn't it? Then what? You preach to yourself, "I'm going to accept this. God orders my life according to his will. I believe that and I'm going to stake everything about my affections upon that reality and be content, even though it's not what I wanted." And if your plans do work out, then you just give thanks to God. "God, thank you. You blessed my plans. Not everybody gets to have their plans work out the way they want, Lord, and here I am, I'm in the unique privileged position of seeing your blessing on what I wanted. God, thank you."

Fourthly, this all kind of, these things all fit together, these all run together, these are all interlocked, interrelated. Fourthly, it makes you serene in your need. Serene in your need. I needed an "s" word there. Peaceful. It helps you to live in peace, even when you don't have what you need or what you want. You're serene in your need. Providence brings peace even in times of affliction because you know that fundamentally God provides for you, God orders your circumstances, and Scripture even says, if we have food and covering, with these we will be content. Are there any of you in here that truly don't have food for today? Are there any of you here that don't have covering for your body? Are there any of you here today that truly don't have some kind of roof to go to? Not everybody does, especially in the degraded way our country is disintegrating but here today in the room, most of you have a place to go home to. There's something waiting for you to eat when you get there. There's a drawer in a closet full of clothes. Scripture says, you have that, why are you so discontent?

In Philippians 4, you can turn there with me, Philippians 4:6. Let's start in verse 5. Philippians 4:5, "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand." The Lord is at hand. The Lord is near. The Lord has ordered these circumstances. The Lord is with us in our midst, even as we speak now, because he said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Where two or three are gathered together, there I am in their midst." Beloved, we are speaking today in the sight of Christ himself, from his word, with everything that we're saying to you. Everything that we're saying, the presence of Christ is at hand and so how do we respond to that? Verse 6, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." And in verse 19, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

The Lord may let us feel the weight of lack, the weight of affliction, for a very long time, but he never abandons his children. If you are without things that you thought you needed, give thanks, be at peace. God is over all. He supplies your need. He's faithful. He cannot change. He must be faithful to himself. If he's your heavenly Father, then commit yourself to him and let him determine the time of the provision and be at peace, so that my preaching students, all 250 of you or whatever the number is here today, you preach to yourself, you go to yourself in your discontent, you stand in front of the bathroom mirror in your discontent and with humility and even with a chastened, afflicted heart that

says, "Lord, I know better than to be like this, but it's time for me to preach to myself." And you preach to your soul and you say, "Soul, you will be at peace here. God is watching over you, my soul, and it is time for you to settle down, to be content, to be at peace, and to trust the God who is over all, whose providence reigns over all, who orders your circumstances, and to be content right there." There's no other legitimate response. To be agitated and discontent in your circumstances is a contradiction of what you say you believe as a Christian. You know, there's an old hymn that we used to sing back in southern Indiana, "I'm satisfied, satisfied with Jesus." But are you really satisfied? Or is your life one of chronic discontentment for whatever reason? If your life is chronically discontent, beloved, then you need to step back, come back to the doctrine of divine providence, and start preaching to yourself. I'm happy for you to preach to yourself on the assumption that you are a genuine Christian. I'm happy for that. But if you're so chronically discontent, and you're always agitated, and always unhappy, there comes a point where you have to examine yourself, "Am I really in Christ? How can I be like this as a pattern of ongoing life if the spirit of peace is really at work in me? If I really am a new creation in Christ and Christ is our peace, then how is it that I live this way? How is it that I talk this way? How is it that I relate this way? How is it that I make such accusations against others this way?" And you say, "Well, Don, if what you're saying is true, there's a lot of people that are professing to be Christians that aren't Christians." And yeah, and that's the whole reason we're having this discussion, is because false views of evangelicalism have conditioned people to think they're Christians when they're not because they haven't truly repented and found their all in all in Christ. And I'm not willing to play along with the game. I am not willing to play along. Scripture is not difficult to understand. What's difficult to understand is how the church can teach these things and be this way, and everybody inside the professing evangelical church actually be born again. That's not okay. Those two things cannot be reconciled.

Now, fifthly, and finally, the conclusion of all of these things is that divine providence makes you satisfied in all things. It makes you satisfied in all things. That's the culmination of it, is that there's an inner tranquility and satisfaction that should be the goal of our hearts to attain, and when we fall short of it, as we inevitably will, not to accept that, justify, or defend it, but to repent of it, and come back to the refuge of our souls, to come back to Christ who is with us always, to come back to Christ who orders our circumstances, to come back to Christ who is with us always, and to say, "Lord, I fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, my cup overflows. Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Psalm 23, that outcome is where God calls us to live. Divine providence makes us satisfied. It makes us thankful. God's hand is in everything that happens in one way or another. Whether it's in affliction or prosperity, whether he gives or he takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

And so, beloved, I've come to the end here. I feel like I'm just getting started. I'd like to go another two hours. You come to the end of these things and you preach to yourself and you say to your soul, you say to your heart, "My soul, my heart, you are under the care of

your heavenly Father. I'm not going to allow you to continue in a grumbling spirit. My soul, you have so many reasons to give thanks. Today, we will be thankful. Today, we will not complain. Today, we will glorify God and say, 'You are sufficient to satisfy everything in my heart.'" And you preach to yourself that way. Beloved, your heavenly Father is directing the details of your life to accomplish his purpose in you so that you will be blessed in the end. Whatever the inconsistencies may appear to be in the time are irrelevant to the greater reality that we have seen from Scripture.

I close with this quote from Charles Spurgeon, who said, "We are here to say – let others say what they please – I know God is here. I am his child, and this is all working for my good. I will not fear, though the earth be moved and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Spurgeon goes on to say, "Oh, I would to God that some of you who are full of worrisome care and anxiety could be delivered from it by a belief in divine providence."

Let's pray together.

Father, help us to that end, to be submissive in adversity, sincere in our obedience, satisfied in Christ in all things, and if, Father, these truths have exposed our hearts as not truly being in Christ at all, may your Spirit draw each one like that out of the false religion, false knowledge, false assumptions, false presuppositions, and into the truth that we might all live forth and bring forth the fruit that your glorious name, that the glorious cross, that your glorious providence, and the glorious consummation all call for, Father, hearts full of gratitude and trust toward you whatever may come before the end. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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