

The Acts of the Apostles

Sermon Number: 18

Acts 10:17 - 11:18

August 7, 2011

Providence and Predestination

We continue this morning with our exposition of the Book of Acts and see an example of how God works in His providence; i.e., how God manages His creation.

The study today in Acts requires that we consider a fairly large portion of Scripture: Acts 10:17 to 11:18. In this passage we will see how God arranged all of the circumstances to move Peter to preach to the Gentiles.

In the last study we saw how God sent an angel to Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Regiment, to command him to send for Peter who was still in Joppa lodging with Simon, a tanner.

Just before the men sent by Cornelius arrived at Joppa to fetch Peter the Lord had just prepared Peter with a vision of a sheet coming down out of heaven full of all kinds of unclean animals, birds, and reptiles. Peter was commanded to "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." Peter, still bound by his Jewish law, at first refused to obey, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." The voice spoke again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This was done three times.

What was the purpose of the vision? The purpose of the vision was to teach Peter that some Gentiles were as much the object of God's sovereign choice in election as was some of the Jews.

God does not save anyone based on their birth certificate.

And Peter had to learn this before he could preach the Gospel; yea before he could even know the Gospel!
Justification is by grace through faith alone!

Now let's see how Peter applied what he had learned.

Do you ever ponder the **providence** of God?

Providence means God's governance or management of His creation.

We say, "Nothing just happens." But do we really believe that God is the first cause of everything? It is true that God uses secondary means and what we call "circumstances" but ultimately God's purpose is in front of, behind, under and over, and around everything

Next question; do you believe in **predestination**?

Providence and predestination overlap but there is a distinction. Providence has mainly to do with the Creation in general and predestination has mainly to do with the salvation of those chosen by God in sovereign election to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Many people in our modern Baptist churches have been taught that the Bible does not teach predestination. I emphasize "modern" baptists because the heritage of the Baptist faith is solidly in the sovereign grace camp.

The best book that I know of on predestination is A Southern Baptist Looks At PREDESTINATION by Patrick Hues Mell, circa 1849, Sprinkle Publications, 2003.

Most Southern Baptists in our generation are Arminian in their soteriology and are ashamed to have a God who is actually in control of anything, much less everything!

Some several years ago I taught a Bible Study at my work place during lunch time. It was open to anyone and men and women from various denominations attended. After one lesson from the ninth of Romans a man who was a Southern Baptist came to talk with me after the class. "Jim," he said, "I have taught Sunday School for 14 years and every now and then the subject of predestination comes up, but nobody believes it."

In answer to this man, I gave him a number of words to look up in a concordance and several passages in the Bible that show the providence of God and predestination and asked him to come back after he had considered them. I don't recall exactly what passages I gave him, but it had to include the story of Joseph and the Books of Ruth and Esther. In about two weeks he said to me, "Jim, predestination is everywhere in the Bible!" He was teachable; too many others just harden their hearts to this great Bible Truth.

Sad to say most people who claim to be Christians in our day do not believe that before the Creation of everything that is not God, that God predetermined when you would be born, the place of your birth, who your parents would be, and all of the seemingly unimportant events in your life; that perhaps might eventually lead to your hearing the Gospel and, if you were chosen by God in divine election, to be convicted of sin and guilt, to repent and believe in the Gospel, and indeed be saved, or justified.

What did Jesus teach about the providence of God?
Did Jesus exclude anything from God's management?

Matthew 10:27-31

²⁷ "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

NKJV

If you are saved, or justified, it was God who took the initiative and your so-called free-will was not the determinate factor in your being justified. In justification, you will repent and confess that the only righteousness that God will accept is the righteousness of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:28-30

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

You will, in fact, make a “decision,” but it will be an informed decision prompted by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit as He quickens a spiritually dead sinner and gives you life.

And that, my dear Brother Walter is why I can sing, “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus, No Turning Back, No Turning Back.”

Brother Walter’s objection to this song is that he believes it to be Arminian in its theology. However, this song could be the theme song of the pilgrim in Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress.”

It is true that “decisionism” has damned many thousands of people who have been deceived into believing that God saved them because they “decided” to allow God to save them.

But when the God the Father calls you, and the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, you will see what God the Son has already done for sinners and you will “decide” to follow Jesus and there is “no turning back.”

It is popular in many Baptist churches to think in terms of a person having a “chance” to be saved. The purpose behind the “invitation” at the end of a sermon; raise your hand, walk the aisle, or just to do something, is to see some results. It doesn’t seem to matter that the great majority of people who “do something” cannot be found in regular church attendance a few years after they were “saved.” More than once I have had someone say to me after preaching, “You did not give an invitation so no one had a chance to be saved.” Well, I aim to show to you from the Bible that salvation is not an accident or by chance.

Think with me: Why are we here in this particular place at this certain time?

To worship God, is, of course, the answer.

But may I ask another question: How do we worship God?

We believe that this Book we call the Bible, is an accurate translation from Hebrew and Greek, and it is God's word in written form. We do not make an idol out of paper and ink, but we do regard these writings as authoritative over every aspect of our life and they are sufficient for our conviction of sin, our knowledge of God, how we may be saved, how we relate to one another, how we organize a local church, and how we should worship God.

But another question arises. Who is God?

It is popular for some people to say, "We all worship the same God."

That is not possible.

The Jews say they worship God, but then they deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of the Scriptures and teach that He is yet to come into the world.

Islam reveres "Allah," but they deny that Jesus of Nazareth is very God.

New Age adherents say that everything is God.

Postmodernists say, among other things, that there is no objective truth, viz. the Bible. They teach pluralism; that all religions are equally valid and that no religion at all is just as good.

The God of this Bible has revealed Himself in creation to the extent that every person who is cognizant is responsible to know that **God is**. We are not told how God deals with imbeciles and infants. It is enough that God is just and holy and that the secret things belong to His own counsel.

Over and above the revelation of God in Creation, the God of this Bible has revealed Himself in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in this Bible, we have the record of His Son, and that by repenting of our sin, and believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, by grace through faith alone, we have eternal life in His name.

“For the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”
John 3:35-36

That being said, I want to use this Bible to proclaim how God influences and controls the circumstances in our lives to accomplish His purpose.

The doctrine is called the **Providence of God or God’s Glorious Predestination.**

Providence means that God is in total and absolute control of His Creation, including the most minute details. God has so ordered and predetermined affairs and events so that that God controls everything and yet man is responsible for his sinful acts.

Predestination is included in God’s Providence but has to do with the justification of individuals. If that truth gives you a tinge of resentment may I encourage you to read this Bible and see if these things I say are according to Scripture? It is very well for you to disagree with me as a mere man, but it is quite another matter to be found fighting against God.

First we will lay the foundation of the doctrine of predestination.

You surely know what the first three chapters of the Book of Ephesians teach. Turn to Ephesians, chapter one.

Ephesians 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,
to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has
blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in
Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the
world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. NKJV

We could talk about how Joseph was “lucky” enough to escape from the pit his brothers had put him in planning to kill him later; and how a caravan “accidentally” came by just in time for his brothers to sell him into slavery.

The story goes on to find Joseph on the throne of Egypt with his brothers and his father Jacob bowing before him fulfilling the prophecy of Joseph’s dreams.

Read the story of Joseph in Genesis 37 to 50 and see how God arranged every event and controlled even the wicked acts of Joseph’s brothers.

What was Joseph's inspired conclusion?

Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." 16 So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 17 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.'" "Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

18 Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants."

19 Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 **But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.** 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. NKJV

The doctrine of predestination is throughout the entire Bible. Does not the record tell us in Acts 2:22-24 about the most wicked act that man ever committed being in God's providence?

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know — 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. NKJV

With that as a foundation let's look at a set of circumstances recorded in Acts 10 & 11:

While God is keeping the universe in balance, the stars in place, our sun at just the right distance from the earth, the grass and trees alive, causing the rain to fall on the just and the unjust, keeping the rivers flowing, determining the fall of a sparrow, keeping up with the hairs on your head, and yes - keeping heaven glorious and hell hot - He has the time and capacity to visit His mercy and grace on a Gentile centurion named Cornelius.

God is not stressed or strained to do what He does without loss of power or energy. A mighty act of God does not diminish Him in any degree.

In Acts 10 we have recorded the first occasion of Gentiles entering into the kingdom of God, being born again, without first becoming Jews!

The Old Testament examples of Gentile believers being saved such as Rahab the Harlot, Ruth the Moabite, Naaman the Syrian, et al essentially accepted the God of Israel and became proselytes to Judaism.

This record in Acts 10 and 11 is about a major event in the history of the church! The writer of Acts, Dr. Luke, gives it two chapters; and Cornelius' experience is listed four times.

Try to grasp the "coincidence" {nothing happens by random chance} of the timing of the events: If you will, "A Tale of Three Cities."

Joppa, Caesarea, and Jerusalem

Imagine an isosceles triangle with its three points, with Caesarea at the top, the two equal sides have Joppa 30 miles to the south; Jerusalem 36 miles east of Joppa, and then 64 miles from Jerusalem northwest to Caesarea.

Peter, a Jew, is at **Joppa** {9:43} staying with Simon a tanner, "days enough."

Cornelius, a Gentile, is at **Caesarea**, a seaport 30 miles north of Joppa, the home of Pilate, Felix, and Festus.

Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, is the birthplace of the Christian Church.

Read and comment on:

Acts 10:17-48

¹⁷ Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. ¹⁸ And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

¹⁹ While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. ²⁰ Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

²¹ Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?"

²² And they said, "Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you." ²³ Then he invited them in and lodged *them*.

On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

²⁴ And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. ²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." ²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. ²⁸ Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. ²⁹ Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

³⁰ So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour* I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, ³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.' ³³ So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God."

³⁴ Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵ But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. ³⁶ The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ — He is Lord of all — ³⁷ that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

³⁹ And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. ⁴⁰ Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴² And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?" ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

You must see how God arranged for Cornelius [a Gentile] to call for Peter [a Jew] and how God prepared Peter to respond to the call to go to Cornelius.

Unless God had taught Peter that He [God] does not show partiality in the justification of individuals, Peter would never have come to Cornelius.

Circumstances

In my personal testimony of how the Lord saved me, and without relating the entire account, God used my interest in the guitar. While I was living in Atlanta in 1964, I began to study guitar, then my company transferred us to Birmingham. In Birmingham a clerk in my office told me that her uncle, was a classical guitarist and that he knew a guitar teacher.

By "coincidence," there was a preacher who was taking lessons from the same teacher. After some time, my guitar teacher told me that the preacher could preach as well as he could play the guitar. God used my curiosity to get me to go to a place where the Gospel was being preached. There is a lot more to the story, but my point is how God arranges "circumstances."

[My Testmony is on Sermon Audio]

How did God arrange the “coincidences” in your life that led you to faith in Jesus Christ?

In Acts 10, we see how Peter and Cornelius were prepared by God to understand one of the great truths of the Word of God:

There is One God and One Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Any person, Jew or Gentile, whatever their race, sex, or whatever their station in life, if indeed they are saved, are saved by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ and in His righteousness.

As already mentioned, this is the first instance of Gentiles coming to faith in Christ without first becoming Jews. These dramatic events are called by some the “Gentile Pentecost.” {Cf. Acts 2}

After the events in Cornelius’ house in Caesarea, Peter went to Jerusalem to announce the great news that the Gospel was spreading and that even the Gentiles were being saved!

Read and comment on Acts 11:1-18:

11 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ²And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, ³saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!”

⁴But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. ⁶When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ⁷And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’ ⁹But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ ¹⁰Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹²Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’ ¹⁵And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.

¹⁶ Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

¹⁸ When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." NKJV

Let me conclude with some observations:

Being religious is not the same as being saved. Nicodemus, in John 3, was very religious when he came to see Jesus, but like most of the other Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, scribes, rulers, and yes, Cornelius, were religious and lost! Among the Jews there were very few that believed that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah.

The Pharisees that Jesus said did not know God were the most religious men on the face of the earth.

Here is the lesson. The Gospel is for all kinds of people. There is only one way of salvation that is true and that is trusting only in Jesus Christ completely. It is not Jesus and your decision; Jesus and your baptism; Jesus and your good works; Jesus and your church membership; it is only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

If there is a shred of self-righteousness mixed with your faith it will condemn you. Jesus Christ is the sufficient Savior.

How do you "get saved?" Receive the free gift of God!

Has God included you in those He ordained to eternal life?
How can you know?

Repent and believe in the Gospel.

**AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND, THAT SAVED A
WRETCH LIKE ME, I ONCE WAS LOST, BUT NOW I'M FOUND,
WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE!**

What should you do? Not “in order to” be saved, but because you are saved, make a public profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour and submit to believers’ baptism.

There may be those here today that have assurance that they trust Christ but they need to join a local church that preaches the truth about God without apology.

Why do you delay? Salvation is not in the public confession; nor in the membership in a local church; but God has given us clear instruction on being obedient to His Word.

Will you encourage us today by telling us what God has done for you?