

Providence: The Will and the Way

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The way that we've defined divine providence is this: God continually upholds his entire creation and sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and he thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes. Now that is an absolute statement. It is comprehensive. It is exhaustive. There is nothing beyond the reach of that definition which we have grounded in Scripture several times over the past three messages and I'm not going to repeat myself on those points again. The question is this that I want to come back to. We sort of touched on it last Tuesday, the question is this: why, then, is there evil, why is there sin in a world, in a universe that is ruled by a holy and sovereign God? Why would a sovereign God permit evil? Why would a holy God permit evil to take place? And this, of course, is one of the great objections in the mouths of unbelievers, you know, why does God let certain things happen and why do babies die and why do people suffer in hunger around the world, and all of that and those can be legitimate questions if they are asked from a humble spirit, from one seeking to come to grips with grief in the midst of a personal tragedy, but so often those statements are made in a context of just objecting to the reign of God and trying to make God look foolish by positing two things that seem to be irreconcilable. Tonight we're going to bring some theological meat to the table for you to eat. We've laid all of the groundwork over the prior three messages for what we want to say tonight, now we're going to grapple with some of the more significant issues and trust me, in the end it comes to a great great climax that is utterly undeniable and is a satisfying answer to the believing heart for these difficult questions. And just to be clear, I sympathize with people who have had losses. That's not my point. That's not what we're talking about tonight. Tonight we're wanting to vindicate the ways of God before his people and that's what I intend to do to the best of my ability, the Holy Spirit giving me help as I preach to you here this evening. Tonight's message if you want to put a title across your note is "Providence the Will and the Way." Providence, the will and the way, and that title points to two questions: what is the will of God in these things and how is it the will of God for these, for evil to exist in his world, and what is the way of God as he overrides and directs evil to accomplish his purposes? So we're going to look at it from those two perspectives.

First of all, providence and the will of God. Providence and the will of God. Now we have said and we have shown repeatedly that God reigns in everything that happens and the teaching of the Bible is that he always accomplishes his purposes. Without exception, God's will is never thwarted. Now that's a bold and an absolute statement and yet as we look at Scripture and as we look at the world around us and as we look at our personal

lives, we see the reality of sin and disobedience all around us. Sin is a defiance in one sense, a defiance of the character and the law and the will of God, and so how is it then that theologians can talk about God always accomplishing his purposes, better stated what does Scripture mean when it says in Ephesians 1 that he works all things after the counsel of his will? This is a difficult problem. This is not something that is solved in a brief tweet that someone sends out and, you know, tries to solve all the depth of theological problems on social media. How foolish is that? No, this requires some serious thinking and one of the things that I love about being able to preach here generally speaking on Tuesday nights, and here specifically tonight, is that I understand and I know and I'm confident that each one of you is here because you want to think deeply about Scripture, you want to think deeply about Christ. Well, this is an invitation to some serious thinking that has a world-shaping impact on the way that you think about the world.

Providence and the will of God, how are we to understand that? Beloved, it starts here in my judgment and in my opinion: the Bible teaches us to make a distinction between God's moral will and what we could call his secret will or his sovereign will. His moral will and his secret will. God's moral will refers to his commands that are revealed in Scripture by which men are to conduct themselves and by which men are to order their belief system in response to divine revelation. If men would act rightly before God, if they would believe rightly before God, they must come before his revealed will, receive it, read it, study it, understand it and submit to it and obey it. That's God's moral will and we're not going to take the time to flesh all of this out for the sake of time and for the sake of the bigger points that we're trying to make here.

Now with that understood, when we think about God's moral will, when people sin, when you sin, when I sin, God's moral will is not fulfilled and in that sense and in that very specific precise manner in which we are speaking at this moment of time, God's will is not accomplished because his moral will is not obeyed, that we're speaking narrowly when we say that. What you must understand, beloved, as a Bible-believing Christian, is that there is a bigger dimension to the will of God than simply the commands that he has revealed in Scripture. Let me say that again because this is a crucial pivot point in understanding the sovereignty of God, the providence of God, and even coming to grips with your own past life, your own past sins, your own pre-converted life, coming to grips with these things in a way that allows you to put it all to rest and to move forward with a sense of peace and confidence that the work of Christ is really being fulfilled and carried out in your life. This is vital to your spiritual health. So there is God's moral will but there is a bigger dimension to God's will than just the commands that he has revealed in Scripture, follow me closely here, there is also the eternal plan of God which is ultimately known only to him in which he planned everything that would ever happen.

Look at Deuteronomy 29:29 and this is a very important text where you see suggestions of this laid out so plainly. Moses told the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 29:29,

29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

Moses says that full knowledge of God and the full purpose of God is something that belongs only to him. He has revealed a portion of his knowledge to us, a portion of his intentions for the world and for the course of world history, he has revealed a portion of it to us but there is more to the mind of God than what is revealed in Scripture. There is more to the purpose of God than what he has revealed in Scripture. There is therefore more to the full counsel of God than what we could possibly begin to know. There are some things that he in his sovereign pleasure has chosen to keep to himself and that will only unfold over the course of time and throughout of eternity, but he has given us in what he has revealed, what he has given in his word is more than sufficient for us to know him truly, to have our sin exposed to us, what has been revealed is sufficient, 2 Timothy 3:15 says, to lead us to salvation which is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is plenty revealed to us but God hasn't given us the totality of his mind. We couldn't begin to get our minds around it anyway. Our finite sinful minds could not begin to grasp the infinite holy mind of God and so one of the things that you see, beloved, as we talk about these things, is that there is a sense in which we have to humble ourselves before the majesty of God, we have to humble ourselves before his great infinite majesty and take a posture of humility as we consider these things. So he has revealed a portion but he has not revealed all and therefore we see that there is this distinction lurking in Scripture of that which is revealed but there is more that has not been revealed and that gives us an entryway into the things that we are talking about here this evening. God's eternal plan is what we could call his secret will, or what we described in our series on systematic theology, the decree of God, the decrees of God by which God determined everything that would ever happen in the course of the universe. He has decreed, established all that would ever happen.

Look at Isaiah 46 with me now, Isaiah 46, beginning in verse 9. As you're turning there, I'll just read verse 8 to lead us into it.

8 Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. 9 Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

This text of Scripture telling us that God declared at the beginning everything that would happen and therefore established its certainty in fulfillment, and his purpose will be done, he will accomplish all of his good pleasure. So what this means is that before the beginning of time, in pre-temporal eternity, God determined everything that would happen so that creation would please him in every respect.

Full stop. Let's just let that sink in for a little bit. Do you know what? This is what a sovereign God does. This is an assertion of God's absolute sovereignty. He didn't create the world, he didn't function as Creator and then leave it to chance or leave things in the hands of men see how it would turn out. He had a plan from the beginning. He has stated clearly that he will bring to pass everything that he intended when he spoke Genesis 1:1, and so we need to come with a sense of reverence, a sense of awe, and a sense of fear and bow before such, and I mean this in a positive constructive sense, before such a terrible majesty like that, that a God of such infinite power and wisdom and ability created the world, had a plan for what he did, and his plan is on track for what he intends to have happen.

I want to give you a little illustration here that I've used at least once in the past just to help set this in your mind with a little illustration and then we'll quote one of my favorite pastors to amplify. You see, the unfolding of history, the unfolding of life from God's perspective, this is not a chess game where God makes a move and then Satan makes a move or you make a move and God has to rub his, figuratively speaking, rub his chin and see what the next move is going to be and wait and then there's this interaction like that. It's not like that. God doesn't make a move and then wait for Satan or man to respond before he knows what to do next. He's got a comprehensive plan that he's working out all the way along. He's not figuring this out. We are not open theists at all, we reject that as heresy, but that still leaves the difficult question, doesn't it? How does sin fit into that? How is there then this disobedience and the seeming conflict between disobedience to God's moral will, which is holy and righteous and good, Romans 7, how do we deal with the tension between that and these other biblical assertions that assert his complete sovereignty and a complete utter plan for everything that ever happened which is comprehensive including the rebellion of man? How are we to understand this? Well, James Montgomery Boice explained it this way, and I quote, he said, "The explanation of the seeming contradiction is that human rebellion while it is in opposition to God's express command, falls within His eternal or hidden purpose." Hear me on this, he didn't say that, I did, continuing the quote, "God permits sin for His own reasons knowing in advance that He will bring sin to judgment in the day of His wrath. In the meantime, it will not go beyond the bounds that He has fixed for it. Many things work against the sovereignty of God from our perspective but from God's perspective, His decrees are always established." That's a lot to chew on, isn't it, but this is how we understand providence and the will of God, this is how we understand and how we start to make some sense of how sin fits into the providence of God, the purpose of God, and the holiness of God, is that God in the greater aspect of his will, the comprehensive nature of his will included within that a place for sin to occur.

Now there are people that would jump up and down, some that would walk out the door on hearing such things but they're not here tonight. I'm not talking about anyone in the church, I'm just speaking generally, like that, but beloved, we have to stand on this ground. To take any other ground is to make man sovereign over God and to say that every time that you sin in your own little ways and big ways, that somehow you are frustrating the purpose of God. Well, when you think about it from that perspective, it ought to occur to you to step back and say, "But wait a second, that can't be the case. It

can't be that even when I'm at my most defiant, that somehow I am overturning the purpose of the eternal omnipotent God." That makes you God. That can't possibly be it. So whatever other difficulties we may have in coming to grips with the reality of these things, we don't ever compromise the sovereignty of God in the things that we say and believe.

So that's providence and the will of God. Secondly, let's go to providence and the way of God and there's, I think we'll pool all of these things together here. Providence and the way of God and by the way of God, what I mean is we want to take a stab at understanding how God does this. These are things beyond our understanding but we can know them partially, we can know them truly even if we don't know them exhaustively. Providence and the way of God. Here's what we want to say. It is easy, beloved, it is easy for you and I to lose our theological balance as we're talking about these things. It's easy to talk about this absolute sovereignty of God and to start to think, for example, that God is therefore just controlling men like marionettes, like puppets and he just pulls strings and makes people flop around and that that's how he controls everything. That's not the scriptural way. That's not the biblical understanding. So just as we recognize that the will of man and the disobedience of man does not overturn the will of God, at the same time we don't go and fall off the other side of the beam and say that therefore God is just pulling strings and making everybody exactly what they do.

Let me step back and approach it this way. Scripture affirms that God rules even over the sin and evil that is in the world. God rules over that and yet we have to pause and emphasize something really important: God is sovereign but God is also holy. God hates evil. He hates sin and he is untainted by its existence. In Habakkuk 1:13, keep that 1:13 in your mind here, there are two references that are 1:13 to give you a place to hang your theological hat on this. Habakkuk 1:13 says,

13 Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor.

James 1:13 says,

13 ... God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

And so as we continue to work through these things, we recognize some really critical things here. God did not create evil directly and personally. He does not tempt men to sin. He does not approve of sin. He cannot be blamed for sin because it did not originate within him as the direct cause of sin. God's holiness is untainted by sin in the world that he created, he is never the personal agent who brings about sin, and so let's just step back and make this a little bit personal here just by way of reminder, when you and I sin in our Christian lives, when we were sinning before our conversion, take your point of reference, pick what you want to make there, and in your sin it must be very clear in your mind that you are personally responsible for your sin and you cannot blame God for it. God did not make you sin, he did not tempt you to sin. If you're sinning now in your life,

God is not approving of that, he's not making you sin, he's not approving of it in any way. You are personally responsible for your own sin and the human race is responsible for its sin and rebellion against God and he is not to be blamed for it. At the same time, sin does not frustrate the accomplishment of God's secret will. God overrules sin to accomplish his purposes. Now these are difficult concepts. This will give you headaches if you think seriously and long about it, and yet they are crucial for you to understand if you are to live a fruitful Christian life.

Now I want to introduce you to an important, often neglected and forgotten theological word called "concurrency." What concurrency, the doctrine of concurrency teaches us is this, is that God continuously and simultaneously operates through the actions of all men and creatures, and he thus directs all their activity in time to fulfill his predetermined eternal purpose, yet without coercing them to violate their nature or will. Oh, that's a lot to take in, isn't it? God continuously and simultaneously operates through the actions of all men and creatures, he directs all their activity in time to fulfill his predetermined eternal purpose, yet here's the important qualifying aspect of that, without coercing them to violate their nature or will. This is what I was saying earlier, that as God works and accomplishes his purpose even through the sins and rebellion of men, he's not forcing them to do that. Genesis 50:20, we looked at it many times, "You meant evil against me but God meant it for good." As Joseph's brothers were sinning against him, God was simultaneously working out good purposes through the bad things that they did and he did not make them sin against Joseph, they did that of their own volition and according to the wicked impulses of their own heart. The same thing with those who crucified Christ. God did not force the Jews to hand him over to Pilate, he did not force Pilate to render an unjust verdict, he did not force the Roman soldiers, but somehow in a way that is beyond my understanding, maybe you can understand and explain it fully and exhaustively, but somehow God has the power and God does work through people without forcing them to do that which brings about his purpose so that they sin in their own responsibility, they sin of their own volition which does not taint God with their wickedness and yet God is so majestic in his sovereign ability that he does not, in a sense, he is able to work independently of the cooperation of men to accomplish his purposes.

If you want me to give you a much simpler definition, we can put it simply like this: God uses the actions of men to carry out his plans. He uses them without forcing them, and I want to tell you and it's fine if you have to go back and listen to this a couple of times and think about this, that's all fine, no one gets this on the first pass through so if this just seems like waves rolling over you and you're about to drown, that's okay. That's okay, that's the way it works, that's what we should expect when we come and we plunge deeply and we looked deeply into the character of God, we should expect to find things that are far beyond our understanding, we should expect to find things that are difficult. When the finite looks into the infinite, when the creature looks into the Creator, so to speak, when the sinner looks into the holy, we should expect to find things that dwarf us and humble us and are not just immediately apparent. God is a deep being and we are very superficial and shallow, and so the fact that this isn't just easily grasped is not an argument against its truth.

One other thing that I would say about it, beloved, is that these are things that are not to be handled with rough hands. These are not things to be contemplated or even spoken of by people who are of a cynical bent toward God. People that are like that and the world is filled with them, they would be better to just walk away from discussions like this rather than sully their own minds and tongues even further by talking about things that are outside their kin. No, this is holy ground. We are looking into the burning bush and this is a place where we take our shoes off in reverence before God as we discuss them and consider them.

Charismatics love to talk about some of the silliest things and talk about their miracles. You know, "God cured my lower back pain. It's a miracle!" They want one great big sign from heaven to prove God's existence. I want you to understand something really important here: the things that we are talking about here in terms of God providentially ordering everything that happens in the universe and his ability to work through the sinful actions of men without being tainted by them, without forcing sinners to do what they do and still use it to accomplish his holy purposes when they intend evil by it, I want to tell you, that's far greater than any one particular miracle in time could ever be. This is mind-blowing majesty that we're talking about here that is of a geometrically exponentially greater scale than any one individual miracle could ever be. These are the great things of God. As far as I'm concerned, they can have their fog machines and their light shows and their glory dust falling from the ceiling. These are the things that the true believer wants. These are the things that God has revealed for us to study and to grasp and to be humbled by, and when we are humbled by these things, we will render him greater, purer, deeper, truer worship because we are worshiping him more closely for who he really is rather than according to our own foolish fancies.

Now pivot here and you could make this a third point but it's not in my notes so if you make it a third point you're kind of cheating but that's okay. Let's answer this question: why would a holy God plan for evil in his own creation? Why would God, stated differently, allow for sin in a world that he created? Why would he do that? What possible good could there be in such a design? Well, let's start with Proverbs 16:4 just to give us a running head start into things here. Proverbs 16:4 and, beloved, let me encourage you with one little thing here as we start to launch this. I promised you earlier in the message that this has great practical relevance to your Christian life. We're getting to that very very soon in a way that is equally mind-expanding and mind-blowing, if I can put it that way, but in a completely different realm.

Proverbs 16:4 says,

4 The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

And so we realize, we look at a text like that and we say, "Okay, here it is in plain black and white. I can't deny this without denying Scripture. Somehow God has a purpose even for the wicked people and wickedness and wicked deeds in the world." He has a purpose for sin and sorrow in the world that he is working out even though from our perspective

we can't begin to understand it and, frankly, if we were honest with ourselves in the midst of our difficulties, we'd say, "You know, if it had been up to me, I'd have done this one different." But we humble ourselves.

Now why would God do that? Beloved, I'm going to give you three things here to kind of wrap up this whole series and I texted a friend before I stepped up to the platform and I told him, I said, "If for some reason this was the last message I ever preached in my life, this would be the one I would want to go out on," and the things that I'm about to tell you are the things that I'd want to go out on. I'm not announcing anything here, I'm just saying hypothetically. Whatever else we say about all of these things about providence that we've talked about, this is the fourth message, fourth and final message on providence, and whatever else we say about why would a holy God plan for evil in his own creation, not cause it but plan for it, determine it, set things into place knowing that that would be the outcome, why would he do that? Well, whatever else we say, one thing it will do is that in the end it will display his justice and his power over all of his enemies.

Look at Philippians 2:9 in this familiar text which we look at from a fresh perspective here this evening. Speaking of Christ after his death on the cross, the Apostle Paul said this,

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

At the end of time when sinners are compelled to kneel before Christ and acknowledge his Lordship and their life of rebellion culminates in an acknowledgment of the supremacy of Jesus Christ, God's power will be on great display. His supremacy over even his enemies will be displayed in a way that we can't begin to fathom and the greatest of powerful men that have defied him will find themselves, as it were, licking the dust before the feet of Christ and, beloved, victory is greater when you achieve triumph over a powerful foe, right? It's no great thing if a Major League baseball team defeats a Little League team 100 to nothing. That's no accomplishment. The foe wasn't worthy of the victory. But when Christ conquers kingdoms and kingdoms and kings bow before him that defied him when they had their power, that victory will be great and that would not be accomplished in any other way except that their rebellion provides the black velvet that shows the 500 carat diamond of the greatness of the power and the majesty and the supremacy of Christ.

That's one thing we could say. Whatever else we say, we can say that. Whatever else we say, whatever else we say about why God would plan for evil in his own creation, whatever else we might say about it, beloved, it'll do this, it will allow him to display his great grace to his people in saving them from their sin. In Revelation 5:9, I'll just read it for you for the sake of time, Revelation 5:9 says that the saints in heaven are singing

9 ... a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

There will be great glory given to Christ because in the majestic work of the atonement at the cross of Calvary he purchased for himself sinners, unworthy rebels against him and forgave them and brought them into the family of God and brought them into this place of glory where they will see him and honor him and love him forever and ever, amen. Beloved, the greatness of his shed blood, the greatness of forgiveness is only known because there was sin that needed forgiving in the first place.

God, therefore, is more greatly revealed and more thoroughly revealed through the introduction of sin into the world than he would have been without it. If there had been no sin to be forgiven, men would not know anything about grace. If there was no sin to be forgiven, there would be no need for the great sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the greatness of the magnanimity of God, the benevolence of God, the goodness, the love of God would never have had occasion for display at Calvary like it did with sin in the world and sinners needing saving and forgiving. Ultimately when you bring Christ into this discussion, you see that providence is displaying the glory of Christ, pointing to Christ and displaying his glory in a way that otherwise would not have happened. And do you see, beloved, I put my elbows on the pulpit table and hold my head in my hands at how important this is, do you see that Christ in the atonement personally took on the cost of sin, personally took on the cost of sorrow, doing it for millions and millions of his own people in a way that far transcends any individual sorrow that you and I will ever suffer in our own lives? And therefore we start to see as much as sorrow hurts us in this life, we start to see and recognize the majesty of Christ as it raises up before our understanding, recognizing that he ordained a world where he would take our sins and sorrows, make them his very own and display in response to our sin in time, display his majesty, his grace and the infinite value of his shed blood in a way that would never have occurred if sin and evil had not entered into the world. We know Christ better as a result of that.

And what's the devotional result of that, devotional not being a very good word, but how does that impact us then and what do we make of that personally? Well, I want to take you to one final passage here in the Gospel of Luke 7. It's a lengthy narrative account and I'm just going to ask you to bear with me as I read it because there's a great concluding final point that we need to see here that I think ties all of this together. In Luke 7:36, and before I start reading it, beloved, let me say this because I'm afraid I'll forget if I don't: God in the operation of his providence and the goal of his providence, God is playing the long game. God is working out a plan that far transcends any one of us, far transcends any individual sorrow or sin or anything like that, God has a massively great plan over all of time and a massively great goal that he is working toward in a way that far massively transcends anything that we could think, and so we can't measure the purposes of God by what we perceive or feel because it's so far beyond us that we can only bow in adoring worship and say, "Lord, there are things that I can't understand but that doesn't mean I

would question You. I just humble myself. I put my hand over my mouth and I cover my ears and my eyes and I just bow in worship before You because, Father, You are working out something that is so far transcendent beyond what I could think that I don't even want to sit in judgment of it, I don't even want to ask these kinds of questions anymore, I just want to sit at Your feet and honor and worship You with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind." That's where this leads you.

Now in Luke 7:36. Follow along with me. We'll take a little break here and just enjoy the narrative.

36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44 Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47 For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." 49 Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" [They recognized his sovereignty in what he was saying] 50 And [Jesus] said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

This is where I think we come out on this, beloved, and the question of why would God allow evil in his world, why did God allow you to pursue a path of sin for so long in such degradation before he saved you, why did he let you stumble in your Christian life in the ways that you now look back on with shame? Well beloved, whatever else we say about it, somehow God's working out a purpose even through that because God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose, right? That's what the Bible says, right? I didn't slip a cog here. My dementia hasn't caught up with me just yet on this point, right? He causes all things to work

together for good to those who love him. On a personal level from that perspective, from a cosmic level, from the worldwide perspective that we've tried to address here tonight as well, listen to me carefully: the introduction of sin means that God's people will love him more throughout eternity than if Adam had never fallen. Because we have been forgiven and because we have been forgiven much, we will love him more because we will see in contrast to our rebellion he dealt with us in grace, that where your sin abounded, that grace abounded all the more, and there will be a greater comprehension, a greater recognition of the eternal character of God that was always there but would have been lost to our perception except that our sin gave the occasion for Christ to come, Christ to save us, Christ to die for us, Christ to love us, Christ to deliver us into heaven. None of that spiritual response of humble grateful love would have been anything like the same but for the introduction of sin.

And as a result of this, beloved, God is more greatly glorified in the praises of his people because they have a fuller greater recognition of who he is and a greater reason to praise him, "You saved me from that? You loved me when I was that kind of an enemy? O God, I am so humbled before You and I give everything in response to You. I worship You totally in response to that." The black backdrop of my sin causes the praise to come out even more effusively, more deeply, more broadly, and in that, beloved, each one of you here claiming Christ, in that is a profound providential word of comfort to you sincere earnest Christians who feel the regret of your past sins, bad decisions, and other ways and manners of life that you would be ashamed for anyone to know. Do you have those things? I do too. What I want you to see, beloved, is this, is that God was working out his providence even in those greatest sorrows, even in your lowest moments, even in the worst of your rebellion. God was working out his providence even then. And therefore, your great sin becomes now the occasion for you to find great love for your Savior who loved you through that, who loved you despite that, who redeemed you from that, and you get a measure of how great his love for you is by the fact that he knew that sin of yours when he went to the cross and he died for you by name anyway.

So yeah, this demolishes any sense of pride, this takes a bulldozer to the pride of your heart and just pushes it out of the way in a negative sense, creating the positive room for your heart to be filled with great gratitude and a deeper understanding to inform a more profound praise to the Christ of your salvation. Hear me carefully here, those things that you have regretted the most that are forgiven in Christ therefore become the occasion for you to give the greater love to him. That's what Jesus said, "If you've been forgiven much, you can love much." If the ground of sin was plowed deeply in your life and in your heart and now you're delivered from it and you love Christ for saving you, then whatever else we say about the depth and the blackness of your sin, that God has now turned that in your mind into the reason and the occasion to love him even more, and you can become a more thorough heart-worshiper of your Savior as a result of that. That's what Jesus said. If you are forgiven much, you love much. In light of that we don't even want pride, we don't even want to defend our self-righteousness because your self-righteousness and your pride over a sense of your comparative betterness than somebody else, that's simply putting the stranglehold on love for Christ. Let that go. Confess your sins broadly and deeply to Christ and say that, "Even somehow providentially You've

given me an occasion to love You even more." I know when I think back to my pre-conversion days in the ways I cursed the name of Christ and used his name as a curse word, and I blasphemed him up and down, up and down, up and down, how I mocked those and scorned those who brought me the Gospel as an unbeliever and it just pains me to remember that I was like that, and to realize that Christ came and saved me anyway and he forgave all of that and embraced me, as it were, with the fullness of his salvation, what can I do except love him even more?

And it means also this, beloved, your great sin is the occasion for great love, it also means this and as I said last week I think, I'll say it again, this is the kind of message that I want you to get and listen to repeatedly. You need to hear this again and again and again to let it sink in. It's taken me 31 years to prepare a message like this. What this means is something else: however you have messed up in your past life, today something is new and what all of this teaching on providence over these past two weeks, these past four messages means is this, it means that you can approach life going forward with this perspective, you can say to yourself, "Whatever my past was, I can let God work out His will as He finds me now." Whatever else the past is, you don't have to go back and second-guess, you don't have to go back and say, "Oh, I wish something different." Providence frees you from all of that and you can say, "This is the life that God has given me now. In His providence which I know is great, which I know is loving, which I know Christ is at the center of this is where God has given me now and that means that this is the place where I can love and worship Him now and find the fullness of the greatness of His sufficiency and His love for me right here." That means that you can trust him even for the outworking of your sins and mistakes and that is glorious. While it pains me to look back at some of those things that I alluded to, they don't control me. They have no power over me. They're like a bee without its stinger just bouncing off the arm. And that's the way it is for all of us who understand these things and embrace them.

So let God work out his will as he finds you now. Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Where your life is right now is somehow the plan that God had all along for you to pivot from the past going forward and trust him for all that lies ahead. God wisely planned it all beforehand and then brought it to pass and one day the outcome of this for you, beloved, you who have sinned greatly and are forgiven greatly, you are going to land in glory, as it were, with the capacity to love Christ ever so greatly because you have been forgiven of so very much.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way, looking to heaven he said, "Do you know that you are destined see Him as He is? Blessed, glorious vision to see the Son of God in all His glory as He is face-to-face. You standing and looking at Him and enjoying Him for all eternity, it is only then that we will begin to understand what He did for us, the price He paid, the cost of our salvation. Oh, let us hold on to this."

So what is providence leading to in the end? What shall we say about the purpose of sin in the world that God created? The outcome will be this: God will be greatly glorified as his people greatly love his beloved Son in great glory forever, and the only question I have, then, is will you be there with me? Will you be there with Christ in that great

culmination of the purpose of God for all of eternity? Come to Christ. Receive eternal life from his hand as a gift of his grace.

Father, may it ever be so. We are just lost tonight in wonder, love and praise, wonder at the greatness of Your sovereignty even over evil in ways that we can't begin to grasp. But Father, even more if that were possible, lost in the wonder of Christ, the love of our Beloved toward us, the One who loved His enemies and gave Himself up for them. Ah, but Father, it's sweeter than that, the One who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Father, I pray that You would put to rest permanently henceforth and forevermore those plaguing second guesses and doubts and, "Why did I do this and why did I do that," in the hearts of Your people. Father, let them cast those cares into the ocean of divine providence and let them drown in the depths of Your wisdom and Your plan and let as those regrets drown, Father, let their rise up from the waters, as it were, an ever-flowing bubbling fountain of love for the One who loved us like You have loved us. We honor Your majesty. We honor Your sovereignty. We honor Your providence. We honor Your Son. From the depths of our hearts, O God, we love You. We worship You. You alone are worthy of our praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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