

God Over You

God Over All

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This is a very very important message in the life of our church. This is a very important message in the life of your spiritual life. This is material that is going to be woven through the fabric of everything we ever do as long as I'm the pastor of Truth Community Fellowship because this message is about you becoming a preacher. It's about you becoming the most important preacher in your own life. This is about how you deal with your soul, how you deal with your anxieties, your fears, your disappointments, your concerns, how you deal with your soul in light of the doctrine of divine providence, and you are the only person that is with you 24/7 and that's one of the reasons why I say that you are the most important preacher in your life. You must be so indued with the knowledge of God, the knowledge of his providence, that you are continually bringing that to bear on your life. Even the best and most faithful of pastors is only around you for at most a few hours a week, 3, 4 hours a week maybe max out of 168 hours in a week, and so the responsibility for walking in an encouraged way in your Christian life ultimately falls upon you. Your pastor can help, your pastor can edify you through the teaching of God's word, but ultimately you need to take your own responsibility to live in light of the things that are revealed in Scripture and discipline your mind and talk to yourself and preach to yourself so that you call your soul to the lofty things that you say you believe found in the Scriptures. I can't do that for you. And what we're going to see today in light of the doctrine of divine providence, is to give you some ways to do that. It's very practically oriented. There is not an aspect of your life that isn't affected by what we're going to talk about here today and there is not a single one of you in here who don't need this. I need this and you need this. We all need to discipline our minds and to bring every thought captive to obedience to Christ and one of the aspects, one of the areas in which you obey Christ in your thinking is to condition your mind to respond to the things that we're going to talk about here today in light of the doctrine of divine providence.

Now, we defined divine providence in the following way over the past two weeks, you see it up on the screen there, but what we've said repeatedly is the doctrine of divine providence means that God continually upholds his entire creation and he sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes. God is over all. That's the title of this series on providence, "God is Over All." God reigns over everything. Last week we saw that he even reigns over sin. He accomplishes his purposes even when men sin. He works out his perfect will. The book of Ephesians says that he is causing all things in the heavens and on the

earth to come together and accomplish his sovereign purposes. There is nothing in the universe that is outside the sovereign guiding hand of God.

Now, that's a broad theological statement. Our concern here today is for you to make that personal in your own life. It's really kind of meaningless for you to believe this if it doesn't affect and influence the way that you think and act. It becomes meaningless if this doesn't become the guiding factor by which you shape your entire life. This is designed to influence everything. The totality of your mind is to be brought into obedience to Christ, part of the way that that is fleshed out in your life is that you bring your mind into obedience to the providence of God right where you're at right here today. We have responsibility, in other words, in light of this doctrine. We don't simply sit back and say, "That's a good theological truth. Good sermon, pastor. Amen. I'm off to do whatever I'm going to do." There should be a continuing and for those of you that find this doctrine new, an ever deepening awareness of the fact that what we're talking about in the doctrine of divine providence shapes every aspect of your thinking, every aspect of your emotions, every aspect of what you say, and every aspect of what you do. And for those of you that are on the brink of important decisions, contemplating things that you may or may not do in the immediate future whether it's whatever, whatever kind of life shaping decisions, you need to come to this doctrine, you need to come to these truths that we're going to talk about here today and before you make any final decisions, you need to have worked through what God's word has to say to you on these issues here today. This is part of our responsibility, it's part of our duty and, beloved, get this, it is part of our privilege as believers in Christ to live in light of this blessed doctrine. God continually upholds his entire creation and sovereignly works in absolutely everything that happens and thus directs all creatures and events to accomplish his purposes.

Before we got into this doctrine of divine providence, we were looking in 1 John and we saw and this is really important for you to keep in mind, we saw that we were looking at Christ as our Advocate in heaven, representing us in heaven. Christ as our propitiation, the one who died to certainly secure our salvation. And this is the Christ, this is the God who reigns over all and if you believe that Christ has rescued you from sin, if you believe that your sins have all been forgiven by his voluntary sacrifice to certainly secure your salvation, if you believe that and you connect that gracious loving act of redemption with the reality that that same God is the one who is orchestrating your circumstances, you can believe and trust in the outworking of his providence in your life. You must think this way if you're a Christian. You must think this way as a Christian because as Christians, our minds are submitted to the authority of God's word and so we have to think this way but we need help in working it out in our lives and that's what the point of this morning is. I want to equip you to become your own best pastor. That's what we're doing here today. The trials that you've been through recently were an outworking of God's providence in your life. The blessings that you've known throughout life were an outworking of God's hand and intentions in your life. The struggles, the sins that you've gone through and the sins that have been committed against you, beloved, relax. God was working out his purposes in your life to bring you to that point. God has been working his entire providence in your life so that today at this particular time you would be right here for this particular message. We are all here by divine appointment here this morning if we

believe in the doctrine of divine providence and so I personally am excited to see what the Lord has for us here today and I hope that you are too.

Now, God's providence is the outworking of what he planned before the world began, is really what that means. He is working it all out and guiding it all to accomplish his ultimate purposes. As you live the Christian life, you should become increasingly aware that God oversees your environment and you should come to an increasingly deepening conviction that his providence is designed for your good and that God will certainly accomplish his holy purposes in your life. Now, there is no reason to resist that doctrine. This takes all the pressure off. This gives you a realm of confidence and peace in which to live. Only a fool who has any acquaintance with biblical doctrine would resist a doctrine like this. This is the guarantee of blessing in your life. This is the confidence of life by which you should live in details great and small.

Now, I want to give you this morning five effects that the knowledge of divine providence should have on your life. These are all intensely practical, immensely personal. I have no doubt today that everything that we're going to say in one way or another is going to touch on your life. This is no abstract theological discourse, this goes to the nitty-gritty of Monday through Saturday for each one of us. So what can we say about the doctrine of divine providence? What does it mean for the way that you live your life and the way that you approach things? What does it mean that God is not only over all but that God is over you? What does that mean for you?

First of all, the doctrine of divine providence should, point 1, it should make you patient in your adversity. It should make you patient in your adversity. Divine providence should make you patient in your adversity because you have to always stick with the "because" clauses. You have to understand the reasons for these things. It is not helpful at all as some of you, many of you, if not all of you at one time or another, it is not helpful at all for a preacher to simply tell you to be patient. It is not at all helpful for a preacher to simply say, "You need to rejoice," without explaining to you the theological truth that undergirds that call to certain spiritual reactions. You have to know and understand why that is. Why is it that you should be patient in your adversity as a Christian? Why is it that you should not give in to panic and react hurriedly to a suddenly adverse situation? Why is that? What is it that you should be preaching to yourself as you look in the mirror when you get up in the morning? Well, divine providence should make you patient in adversity because your heavenly Father, if you belong to our Lord Jesus Christ, your heavenly Father orchestrates your circumstances for his own purposes and he orchestrates your circumstances whether they are pleasant or difficult. The sudden appearance of difficulty should not shake you from this conviction that God is at work in all things and certainly has my good in mind. You look beyond your circumstances to see the sovereign hand that ordained them for you.

Now, with that in mind, I want you to turn to the book of Job 1. We need to see this. This message is all about responding to divine providence. You know the story of Job to one degree or another. Scripture says that he was a righteous man, the most righteous blameless man on the face of the earth at his time which was long before Old Testament

writings really began; his life probably predates the writing of the Old Testament itself. But he was a righteous man and there is this dialogue suddenly between God and Satan and Satan challenges the blamelessness of this servant and God says, "You can test him, Satan, but I am going to orchestrate and prescribe the limits of the testing."

Chapter 1, verse 12, "the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.' So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD." Listen, Satan is never an unrestrained force in the life of a believer. Never. He is always working within boundaries that the Lord has established and we see that in the life of Job. God said, "You cannot touch his life. Don't put your hand on him," at this point, and you know what happens in verse 13, his sons and daughters, Job was with them eating and drinking wine in their older brother's house, actually Job wasn't with them there, but "a messenger came to Job and said, 'The oxen were plowing and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.'" This righteous man, this wealthy man has suddenly been received with news that it's starting to slip away. While that man was still speaking, verse 16, "another also came and said, 'The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.'" This all happened in a matter of five minutes because everything is while he was still speaking. Look at verse 17, "While he was still speaking, another also came and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.'" Verse 18, "While he was still speaking, another also came and said, 'Your sons and your daughters are gone. They were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people. Job, they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you.'" This is a colossal collapse of a man's life, the external circumstances of a man's life all around him in a matter of moments.

For our purposes here today, what I want you to see is Job's response and the grounds upon which he made his response. Verse 20, "Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.'" You see he attributed it all to the hand of God. "I received it from God initially, now I've lost it but it's still at the hand of God." So what is my response then? "Blessed be the name of the LORD." Verse 22, "Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."

Now, chapter 2, verse 1, day came, Satan came before the Lord, "The LORD said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?'" You know what he said, "I am a roaming about on the earth." Verse 3, "The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job?'" Notice how the Lord is the initiator in this. "For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." Satan says, "Yeah, but that's only because You didn't let me take his health away from him, Lord." Verse 5, "'put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.'" So the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your power, only spare

his life." See again, the Lord orchestrating, giving the boundaries on this. So "Satan went out from the presence of the LORD," verse 7, "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a broken piece of pottery, scraping himself while he was sitting among the ashes." Then Mrs. Job appears on the scene and said, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" And look at what he says in verse 10 and this is the whole point for point 1 here: "He said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

Now look, I understand that most of you in one degree or another have been conditioned to think that God's desire is to continually bless your external circumstances so that comfort and ease will come your way and when bad things come, you immediately pray for God to change these circumstances. Understand that when you realize, understand the doctrine of divine providence, understand that God has ordained those difficult circumstances for you. These are not instruments against the working of his purposes in your life, these difficult circumstances are an outworking of his purposes in life and that changes your whole perspective in which you look at them. It changes absolutely everything. All of a sudden it makes you patient. If you're going to be so quick to ask for the blessing of God, don't you see that corresponding to that is a responsibility to accept adversity when he in his wisdom puts it in your path?

Beloved, understand this most important point: God's primary purpose in your life is not to satisfy you, God's primary purpose in your life is to sanctify you if you're a Christian. His primary purpose is to perfect you in a way that will make you increasingly like our Lord Jesus Christ and understand that our Lord was what? A man of sorrows. Sometimes life is going to be sorrowful for you and when that happens, you don't resist it, you don't angrily call out against it, you don't sit down in despair, you patiently say, "Lord, I understand that this is from your hands and while I wouldn't have chosen these adverse circumstances in my life, you obviously have appointed them for me. I know, I am confident of your love for me because all I have to do is quickly look back to the cross and remember my Lord Jesus Christ bearing the curse on my behalf so that I could be forgiven of my sins. So I don't question your motives in this, Lord. Your motive of love in my life was permanently established at the cross and so, Lord, you have deemed it wise and best for me to be in this adversity. I humble myself under the hand of it, O God, and because I trust you, I accept what you in your wisdom have appointed for me." I know these are hard truths to hear. I know that you cry out against the circumstances and I'm not critical of that emotional response. What I'm saying is that as a Christian, you have to bring all of that under the umbrella of the good and sovereign gracious hand of God and say, "Lord, I'm going to be patient under this stroke of adversity because I trust you and I believe what the Bible says."

And brothers and sisters in Christ, what you see from the life of Job here as he says, "Blessed be the name of the LORD," when he had lost all of his children as well as all of his wealth, what you see from the life of Job when he says, "Shall we not accept good from God and not accept adversity?" under the pain of medical affliction, what you see here, beloved, is so fundamental to Christian living. What you see here is that we as

Christians are called to love the Giver more than the gifts; to treasure the one who wisely ordains our circumstances over the way he orders our circumstances. We love him more than what he gives us, and if the Giver of life, if the Orchestrator, if the Conductor of your circumstances has led you to a portion of life that is one of adversity, you are patient in it. If it is one of blessing and external gladness, you are thankful. But the point is that your eye is always on the Giver supremely over your individual circumstances and if he has given adversity to you here today, you bow before his wisdom and benevolence and you trust him to lift that adversity when he sees fit and you say, "God, I am content solely to be in your hands and therefore I'll be patient under this adversity."

Then I said this was kind of the school of preaching here this morning, and then you lift yourself up and you preach to yourself, maybe literally look at yourself in the mirror and you preach to yourself and you say, "Self, you need to be patient in these circumstances. Don't you know what's true about the providence of God? The love of God? Don't you know," you're saying this to yourself now, you're taking yourself in hand and rather than giving in continually one more time to your emotional reaction against what's happening, you shape your mind and reaction by truth and you call your own heart to respond in trust to what God has done and you say, "Soul, you need to be patient here because, remember, the Lord himself is the Orchestrator, the Conductor, the one who is in sovereign control of your circumstances and therefore, Soul, therefore, my soul, listen to me when I say be patient here because God's providence is at work." And you take yourself in hand, you preach to yourself and you calm the stormy waters of your own heart by calling to mind and remembering what the Scripture declares to be true. That's where you start. It makes you patient in your adversity.

Now, secondly. Divine providence doesn't only make you patient in your adversity, it has another effect as well. We're not going to talk about all of the effects we could talk about today. Secondly, divine providence should make you sincere in your obedience to God. It should make you sincere in your obedience to his word. Now, why is that? Why does divine providence have that effect on you? Well, first of all, you remember that God is holy and you remember as a believer in Christ you are called to love holiness to begin with, and so you're already, your heart is already oriented toward holiness because the whole point of your repentance and faith in Christ was that you wanted to get away from sin and into the realm of righteousness. You saw sin for the ugly, foul thing in your life that it was and you wanted deliverance from that and so you cried out to Christ for mercy. "Save me, O God, from my sinful self! Save me from your wrath! O Lord Jesus, you must save me or I am ever lost!" That was the spirit of your heart even if it wasn't those exact words and so you're already oriented toward holiness. Now, what does providence do to you? Well, it has this effect: you realize that God is going to hold you accountable to what he has revealed in Scripture. God has revealed his word and we as Christians, we look at his word, we study his word, we read it, we understand it, and the Scriptures teach us that as we live out our lives under the providential orchestration of God, that our responses to it are going to be a means, a matter of accountability one day before him.

Look at the book of Ecclesiastes, just after the book of Proverbs and Psalms in your Bible. Psalms and Proverbs, the book of Ecclesiastes in the very last two verses, chapter

12, verses 13 and 14. This all has implications, shall we say. You see, it's more than just a matter of enduring through adversity, all of life is a stage for your obedience and all of life is ordained by God for you to respond to, and the writer of Ecclesiastes says in chapter 12, verse 13, he says, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is this," here is Solomon, some conclusion of his whole observations of life, he says, "fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For," verse 14, "God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."

So in the doctrine of divine providence you see that everything that you do in response to providence is going to be a matter of accountability before God. That causes you to step back, as it were, and realize that that means that you have to honor God through your obedience to his revealed will. You respond to what he commands in Scripture in any given situation and that affects the way that you respond to temptation even, the variety of temptations that are collectively represented in this room. When temptation comes to you, the doctrine of providence has this effect on you: in a negative way you say it like this, it is a nonstarter when temptation comes to you to look at providence and say, "Oh, well if God has arranged all of my circumstances, here I am in the midst of this temptation, it must be okay for me to follow through on it and into sin because, after all, God has arranged providence here and here I find myself in temptation so I am justified in giving into it." That is an absolutely wrong way to think. It's an absolutely wrong way to think. You need to think the exact opposite. You say, "No, God has arranged providence so that I will obey him in these circumstances; so that I will be faithful to him in these circumstances." And rather than saying, "Providence justifies my sin and my continued lousy attitudes because, after all, I've been dealt a very tough and in life," no, providence will take you rather to say, "No, the Lord has called me to holiness. There must be in this some way for me to walk through in a way that honors God, a way that allows me to obey him in this because he has called me to holiness and I'm going to look past the immediate allure of this temptation so that I'll be careful to obey him in it." Your mind is shaped by 1 Corinthians 10:13 that says, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is 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 also so that you will be able to endure it."

Listen, the moment you feel temptation in your life, you should recognize that somewhere in the totality of these circumstances is the way for me to escape it and to walk in obedience. For some of you, it's as simple as recognizing that there is an off button on your computer. There is your escape when temptation comes in front of your computer. Look for the little off button. They all have them. Look for the off button and push it and get up and walk away. There is your escape. It's usually not that complicated. It's only under the influence of temptation and wanting to give into sin that we narrow our focus and don't look for it. Your job is to fulfill your responsibility and trust God to accomplish his purposes. Your goal is to be sincere in your obedience.

Now, example to illustrate it from a different perspective. Obedience isn't just in response to temptation and avoiding temptation, sometimes it's a matter in what you proactively do. Here's another way to think about it; a simple little illustration simply to show how

practical this is. I have a wife and six children. That's a lot of mouths to feed. That's okay. The Lord has always taken care of us and he always will. But my wife and my six kids depend on me to be the breadwinner for the house. I have that responsibility. I need to obey the Scriptures and provide for that. What's going to happen to them if I suddenly die? Well, if I happen to die, it would be a major disruption in their lives including financially and so this is so simple, most of you, I probably don't even have to make a point like this, over the years what I've done is I have kept an insurance policy on my life, an insurance policy that will provide for them financially in the event that I'm gone. There are a lot of people in Christendom that would say, "You are not showing faith. You should be trusting God for your family, not buying insurance." I see some insurance agents in here. I know that they are rooting me on here as I talk about the value of insurance. But look, life insurance is one of the providential ways that I obey God because I take the opportunity that I have now, I make plans for an uncertain future, and I make sure that even if I'm gone I have established something so that my family will be cared for in my sudden absence. Look, I've had lots of family members die suddenly. It could happen to me today. Well, one of the things that you do when you believe in divine providence is you say, "What's my duty? What's my responsibility? To whom do I have responsibility? Who looks to me for care and what can I do to make sure that they are cared for?" You see, divine providence makes you sincere in your obedience. It makes you take provision to provide and not foolishly and presumptuously just say, "Well, I'm going to trust God for it." You obey God and that obedience is a matter of trusting God, it's not contrary to trusting God.

Sometimes God simply uses the human means at our disposal in order to provide for us and so what that means for you, you need to preach to yourself. You need to look at, you need to think through the realms of responsibility that you have in relationships, in your employment, different things, and say, "I have a responsibility here to obey God in this. I can't therefore be irresponsible. I can't simply flit about and do whatever I want to do. People are depending on me. God has called me to certain standards of conduct in various relationships throughout my life and I need to obey. I need to be faithful. I need to fulfill those responsibilities because one day I'm going to give an account for them." And all of life suddenly becomes a realm, a stage upon which you live out your obedience and you do that sincerely, gladly, in response to an informed understanding of divine providence. "God has given me these circumstances, these circle of relationships, and my responsibility now is to be faithful and to obey right there." And you do it sincerely. You do it gladly and you preach to yourself, "Self, be obedient here. Self, be sincere. Be thoughtful in your obedience. Self, be patient in your adversity."

Thirdly, divine providence makes you dependent in your planning. Dependent in your planning. This is a subject of a whole other message that I'm not even going to bother to preach. I'll stick that one in my pocket and save it for another time. But divine providence means this as you look to the future, divine providence should make you dependent on God as you make your plans because God is the one who controls the future, not you. You're not in control of your future. You're not. You think you are but you're not. God's control, the fact that God is working out things according to his plan means that the events of your life are such that you cannot predict with certainty what life is going to be

like tomorrow. You don't know what life is going to be like tomorrow. It's okay to plan. The Bible commends planning, but you make your plans with a humble recognition that they must come to pass by the hand of God or they won't come to pass at all.

And with that thought in mind, turn to the book of James 4, going back in the New Testament, after the Gospels, after the book of Acts, just after the book of Hebrews. The book of James 4. Again, we're just saying what are the practical implications of divine providence here and in verse 13 we see this, James says, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.'" Look at their confident predictions about the future. "We're going to go. Not only are we going to engage in business, we are going to make a profit." James rebukes them and he says, "You don't know what your life is going to be like tomorrow," verse 14. "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Part of the implications of this for your plans is this: is that there should always be a qualifier in your mind that, "I'm making my plans here but I'm subject to divine providence. I can't guarantee the future with my plans. I can't guarantee what's going to happen because it's God who controls all things and it's God that is working to accomplish his purposes. I'm a player in the grander scheme of things. God is the one who is working this out and that means that I cannot declare with certainty from where I'm standing what's going to happen tomorrow." And that has a humbling sanctifying impact on you because it teaches you as you train your mind over time to look to God with dependence and say, "God, I'm not the one in charge here." And God may for his own good reasons thwart even your good and well intentioned plans, not just your sinful plans; sometimes you have really good plans and events intervene and frustrate them from happening. Recognize when that occurs, the providential hand of God teaching you to be dependent in your planning. This is in big stuff, it's in little day to day stuff.

In my earliest days in seminary, we had three children under the age of five, and to try to find a quiet hour to study was quite the challenge from time to time. Those days are long gone now but it was hard to get a quiet hour to study, just too many things going on. The kids need this. The kids need that. So from time to time what I would do is I worked it out and I would get up really really early in order to have a quiet time of study for my classes, for prayer, and I had my mind set on quiet communion with God. Now, is that a good goal for a Christian to have, to order his life to do that? Of course it is. Draw away. Be alone with God. So I'm looking forward to this more days than I can tell you. Inevitably, what would happen is I would hear the little pitter patter of a two-year-old's feet, maybe not even two years old, and bursting open through the door is my son, Daniel. A big smile on his face. Obviously ready to play. "Dad, I see you got up early so we could play!" He can't speak, he can't even think that way but that's what's going through that little two-year-old interrupting mind. "It's time to play because Dad is up!" Totally unaware, indifferent to the plans that I had for my day.

Now, I wish I could tell you that I responded rightly to those circumstances when they came, but I didn't, and the frustration that I felt in those moments, the irritation that I felt that my plans had been interrupted, showed that at that time I was far too selfish to appreciate the intervention of divine providence in my life. I looked at this as an interruption to my plans therefore I resented it, rather than appreciating the fact that what God had established for my day at that particular time was different and embracing it. Was it really going to be so bad to play with my only son? Was it really going to be so bad to put aside the books and take advantage of a day that can't be repeated? That's an awful way to think. That's an ungodly way to think. That's an ungodly way to react. I needed to be more dependent on the Lord in my planning. It would have been far more godly for me to say, "Okay, I'm not going to pray now. I'm not going to read my Bible now. I've got a boy to give my attention to." That would have been the godly response.

You see, beloved, here's the point: you make your plans, little day by day plans with your task list, you make your big plans for life, "I've got this thought for my family and I've got this plan for what I want life to be and this plan for my career," and then suddenly something intervenes and it doesn't work out. What are you going to do then if you believe in the doctrine of divine providence? You humbly step back and say, "Lord, it was never about my plans to begin with. It's always been about me living faithfully in light of divine providence. You have brought something different into my life, Lord, than what I had planned, what I wanted. Do you know what I'm going to do, Lord, and it's about time that I did? Lord, what I'm going to do is I'm going to respond graciously, patiently, dependently and accept this change from you because I believe my life is an outworking of your providence and I trust you and I love you. So in these altered conditions, Lord, now what would you have me do?" You understand that God's sovereignty prevails over your plans and when your plans don't work out, you don't get frustrated. Your plans have always been and always are subject to how God directs you, it's simply a question of how you're going to respond when the change comes.

Now, let me say a pastoral word to those of you that are dealing with long-term serious profound discouragement because of this change in the way that you planned. If life hasn't worked out the way that you wanted, life hasn't worked out the way that you had hoped, you need to drink from this well found in Proverbs 16:9 that says, "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." Proverbs 16:9 if you're looking it up, if you want to take it down in your notes. "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." Here's what that means: as you look back, you can completely reinterpret your life and say, "You know, I had planned these things in my youth and, wow, it just didn't work out like I thought." It's not bad that you planned and, beloved, it's not even an indication of failure on your part in many circumstances that your plans didn't work out. It is simply an indication that the Lord has directed your steps differently. Your plans got the momentum going but the Lord was always at the wheel steering it where he wanted it to go. And you can look back on your failed plans, you can look back on your own irresponsibility even, and say, "Whatever is in the past, I am certain today that the Lord has directed me right here and that changes everything about the way that I respond, and I'm going to depend on my Lord. I'm going to depend on the way the whole history of providence in my life. I'm going to depend on him for that. I'm

going to depend on him as I look to the future with uncertain health and uncertain finances and uncertain relationships, and I'm just going to depend upon him and depend upon his word which says he continually upholds his creation and directs it to accomplish his purposes. Do you know what? I'm part of his creation. Not only that, I belong to him by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm part of the family of God. He's my heavenly Father. It would be impossible," as you're looking in the mirror and starting to preach to yourself, you look at yourself in the mirror and you say, "Listen, it would be impossible for God to have bad intentions for my life, and though the circumstances seem to contradict it right now, that's just a minor little thing. The big thing, Self, is that you believe in the providence of God and you," speaking to yourself, taking yourself in hand, this is the Truth Community School of Personal Preaching we're talking about here, you preach to yourself and say, "Self, your plans were never the final say anyway. It was always about what God was going to do, you just didn't realize it. Self, God orders your life according to his wise providence. Self, trust him. Enough of the complaining, Self. Enough of the panic, Self. Enough of the running from situation to situation, Self. Sit down, be still and know that he is God." And you depend upon him.

Then for those of you where your plans have worked out, God has blessed what you've done and gone beyond what you thought was possible, God is giving you more than you asked, more than you planned, don't be like Nebuchadnezzar and say, "My hand did all of this." No, again, you humble yourself. You bow before God and give him thanks and say, "Lord, my plans worked out because you blessed them. I couldn't have done it apart from your guiding hand. I couldn't have done it without your blessing." So it all orients you back to being God-centered, Christ-centered, biblically-centered in your thinking.

Now, what have we said so far? We've said that it makes you patient in adversity; it makes you sincere in your obedience; it makes you dependent in your planning; fourthly, these start to overlap with one another, it makes you peaceful in your need. It makes you peaceful in your need. Divine providence should make you peaceful in your need because, again, if you want to a clue to really following my preaching, listen for that word "because"; this is a long-term thing that I'm telling you here: listen for the "because." It's the "because" that really starts to shape your heart, shapes your response. Divine providence should make you peaceful in your need because you know that God is in control of your circumstances and because you know that he always cares for his children. If you've been reconciled to God, you belong to the family of God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, you belong to the family of God, then he has brought you into his family with the intention of providentially ordering your life to achieve blessing to you and that doesn't mean that you always have it right at hand at the very moment that you think about it. Sometimes you are in positions of need.

What do you do then? "I know, let's panic and let's run from the circumstances as quickly as we can and see if we can't find God's blessing someplace else." No, that's not what you do. That's not what you do at all, beloved. Sometimes people need to make decisions and do different things, I understand that, but never making decisions, never moving on in a position of panic; never in a position of, "I don't know what's going to happen here." No, before you make any decisions when you're like that, you've got to come back and be

peaceful in your need and say, "Look, the Lord Jesus Christ has saved me to bless me. God is in control. He takes care of his children and so I am going to rest here and not simply panic." You look at yourself in the mirror again and you preach to yourself again and say, "Self," you can call yourself by your own first name but I can't. If I did it 130 times here that would be just really awkward. You say to yourself, "Don, relax. Be peaceful. Get yourself under control here and stop the wild anxiety. Stop the panic responses. Don't you know that you can be at peace, Don, because God is providentially in control of everything."

Look at Philippians 4, a familiar passage, not taking you to any obscure Scripture here today, am I? I'm not finding something in Zephaniah 2 that I say is the rule of all of Christian life. No, it's all right there. It's all stuff you know already. Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything," there it is again, the comprehensive nature of divine providence, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Verse 19, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

You see, beloved, what I want you to do, what I want you to think about is the way that you respond to life reflects on your view of the glory of God. The way that you respond to life reflects on what you think about his providence, and if your mind is truly rooted in the truth of divine providence, a crushing blow has been dealt to anxiety in your life. A crushing blow has been dealt to it and you say, "But I've been anxious all this time, now what?" Well listen, if nothing else God has used your anxiety to bring you to a point where you see the absence of a controlling principle of divine providence in your thinking and now you can change. You can start to think differently. You're no longer the prisoner of your circumstances because you have been theologically released to think differently and say, "Oh, God is in control here. He has always been in control. I can settle down and by my life reflect and testify that the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of my trust even in my time of need." The reality that your heavenly Father reigns over all and has promised to supply your need should comfort your heart in every situation. You say to yourself, "I am going to be at peace in this situation because my heavenly Father rules and I trust him and that's all I need to know."

Final point here, alluded to it earlier. Where does this bring you? Point 5, divine providence makes you what? Thankful in all things. Thankful in all things. Divine providence makes you thankful in all things because you have started to think through it all. This same God who ordained your salvation at the cross, this same Christ who shed his lifeblood on your behalf when you were desperately lost, before you could do anything about it, Christ had already secured your salvation with his shed blood on the cross, that God who cared for your eternal soul, beloved, that God who went to such extremes as the incarnation and the crucifixion and the resurrection and the ascension to make sure that your soul was eternally secure, that same God is in control and directing the lesser circumstances of your temporary earthly life, and when you take that into account, it permeates your heart with gratitude. You say, "I am so unworthy of this. I couldn't have asked for this realm of salvation to be bestowed on me and yet God has

done it. God has brought me to Christ. I'm going to heaven when I die. How bad could this really be in the big long term scheme of eternal grandeur of things? God, I am grateful. Yeah, yeah, this stuff, it stinks. Lord, I'm grateful because I look behind the visible circumstances and I see with understanding illuminated from your word that your invisible hand is driving all of this to accomplish good for me in the end and I trust you for that and therefore I am grateful." Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do in word or deed," whatever you do, in all things, "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "in everything give thanks." It just starts to get redundant after a while, doesn't it? Everything. All things. Whatever you do.

And you can do that because you believe in divine providence and so you preach to yourself, you look at yourself in the mirror again, "Don, you are going to be grateful in all things. Don, you are going to be thankful in all things because, Don, Don, Don, be quiet. Don, be still. Get yourself under control, Don, and remember that you're under the care of your heavenly Father no matter what the circumstances look like right now. Don, you're under the control of your heavenly Father. Isn't that great? Don, you're not going to grumble here. Don, you're not going to complain here. That wouldn't be worthy of the Christ who saved you. You could only grumble if you contradicted everything that the Bible says about divine providence. You can be grateful here, Don. Don, you have so many reasons to give thanks. Let's start naming them off one by one. Oh, there's Christ and there are the Scriptures and there is the indwelling Spirit. There is my family. There is the provision of God. I have a hope of heaven." And I just start going and I'm lost in wonder, awe and praise because you rooted your thinking in divine providence from the very beginning. That's where this blessed doctrine takes you.

Christian, your heavenly Father is directing the entirety of the universe to accomplish his purposes, included in that is the reality that he is directing your life to accomplish his purposes and he intends to bless you in the end. There will be no question, beloved, when you are in heaven around the throne of God that he did all things well, and so what you do as a Christian today is you take the glory of that and bring it into the present. You take the reality of the unseen providence and you apply it to today. You take the past of the cross and you bring it into today. You say, "I am so filled and surrounded by the blessing and goodness of God that I'm going to obey him and walk with him. I'm going to be patient when adversity comes. I'm going to depend on him. I am going to be thankful." So Christian, trust him. Obey him. And thank him.

Bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, as we try to grasp the grandeur of what your word means in these things, we're really unable to do so. Our hearts and our minds aren't big enough to contain the fullness of the greatness of your intentions toward our lives. Lord, the hairs on our head are numbered. Sparrows don't fall to the ground apart from you. Lord, you saved us not to cast us upon a sea of uncertainty and unpredictable future things, but you saved us so that we might rest our hearts in your perfect control and to trust you for it. And Lord, collectively, corporately as this body of believers, we state unequivocally that we do. We

do trust you, our Lord. We will obey you, our Lord. We will thank you, our Lord. And I just pray that individually as we come to grips and think through these things and apply them to our lives, Father, that for each man, woman and child here working through these different aspects of thought, that you would guide even their thoughts and attentions to the fulfillment of what divine providence means in our lives: gratitude, trust and peace and obedience. Help us to that end, our God. Be gracious to us we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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