

THE HIDDEN HAND OF LOVE: **How God's Providence is at Work for Our Good and His Glory**

(Romans 8:28)

I. PRELIMINARIES

- A. Opening Prayer
- B. Dismiss Kids
- C. Reading of Today's Text:

²⁸ And we know that God is working all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *his* purpose.

II. OPENING ILLUSTRATIONS

- A. Dean's broken Volvo
 - His immediate understanding (the hidden hand)
 - His immediate joy

- B. Joni's broken neck

- Her desperate struggle for understanding

When it came to my accident, I had to know whether the buck stopped with him, and if it did, why didn't he prevent my accident? – Joni

- Her arrival at understanding: she studied the greats and came to see the hidden hand sending her a severe mercy
- Her life verse (Rom. 8:28)
- More on Joni later

C. MP: Whether we think of Job, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Naomi, Ruth, David, Daniel, Esther, or the Lord's holy apostles and prophets, the story is always the same: With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight we can clearly see the hidden hand of God working in their joys and sorrows to produce holiness, fruitfulness, and joy in this life, and eternal glory in the next. *And no text in the Bible teaches this great truth better than today's!*

III. REVIEW / INTRODUCTION

- A. The theme of Romans 8:

- The gifts of God, inherited by all who are righteous in Christ: effectual calling, justification, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification (and one day) glorification
- Once inherited, the understanding of these (and related) gifts supplies the key to victorious

B. Today's Gift:

- *The gift of seeing the hidden hand of Divine Love in all things (v. 28)*

IV. THE COMFORT OF SEEING THE HIDDEN HAND OF LOVE IN ALL THINGS

²⁸ And we know that God is causing all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *his* purpose.

A. We have received knowledge

And we know . . .

- There's lots we don't know
- For example, we don't know what we should pray for
- But we *do* know that the Spirit is interceding for us with groans too deep for words, and that God the Father sees, hears, and answers (Rom. 8, Rev. 8)
- But Paul has in mind something more that we do know, something comforting

B. We have knowledge of God's Providence

. . . that God is working all things together for good

1. This is the classic Bible verse dealing with God's Providence: the idea that God the Creator is in total control of everything that happens in his universe, that what he does he does according to a plan, and that the plan is a good one—good for his people, and good for his glory.

2. Providence defined by the London Baptist Confession (LBC):

God, the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom, upholds, directs, arranges, and governs all creatures and all things, from the greatest to the least, by his perfectly wise and holy providence, to the purpose for which they were created. He governs according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and unchangeable counsel of his own will. His providence leads to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.

3. Key biblical truths about God's Providence

a. It is based on God's predetermined purpose and plan for the universe (HSL)

In him we also have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his *own* will. Eph. 1:11

b. It includes the whole universe, taking in all things, all persons, and all events, of all time and all places

²⁴ The God who created the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made with human hands; ²⁵ nor is he served with human hands, as if he stood in need of anything at all, since he himself gives to everyone life, breath, and all things. ²⁶ Moreover, from one man⁶ he made every nation of the human race,⁷ and caused them to reside across the entire face of the earth, having ordained their pre-determined times and the precise boundaries of the places where they would live. ²⁷ He did this so that they would search for God, and in hopes that⁸ they would reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said: 'For we too are his offspring.'⁸ – Acts 17:24f

³⁶ For from him, and through him, and for him are all things, to whom be the glory forever! Amen. – Rom. 11:36 (Acts 17:24f)

c. It operates in such a way that men and women remain free and responsible for the decisions they make, whether good or evil.

²² "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God through miracles, wonders, and signs that God performed through him in your midst—as you yourselves well know—²³ this man, who was handed over to his enemies in accordance with the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you yourselves put to death, nailing him to a cross by the hands of lawless men. – Acts 2:22f

"Sovereign Lord, you are he who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ and who spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of our forefather David, your servant, saying, 'Why did the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?' ²⁶ The kings of the earth stood side by side, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed.'¹¹ ²⁷ For both Herod and Pontius Pilate—along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel—did indeed gather together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your purpose predestined to occur. – Acts 3:24f

C. We have knowledge of a special good meant for the special objects of God's Providence

And we know God is working all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

- The Lord is good to all (Psalm 145:9)
- But he is specially good to a special people: those who love Him, those who are the called according to his purpose
- The good in view here is not temporal or physical; many of God's children do not enjoy very many such goods (*contra* the Prosperity Gospel)
- The good in view is spiritual: Justification, sanctification, glorification, and eternal life in the World to Come
- **In sum: God is unfolding the great drama of cosmic history with a view to the salvation and glorification of the Bride of Christ, all to the glory of God.**

The providence of God in a general way includes all creatures, but in a special way it takes care of his church and arranges all things to its good. -- LBC

VI. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

A. If you are not a Christian, understand that the Hidden Hand is at work in your life to guide your thoughts to God, Christ, and Salvation (Acts 17)

B. If you are a Christian, always remember:

1. The hidden hand is extended in love, special love!

2. For this reason, the hidden hand is sometimes extended to test, chasten, teach, and purify (for that's what love does!):

The perfectly wise, righteous, and gracious God often allows his own children for a time to experience a variety of temptations and the sinfulness of their own hearts. He does this to chastise them for their former sins, or to make them aware of the hidden strength of the corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, so that they may be humbled. He also does this to lead them to a closer and more constant dependence on him to sustain them, to make them more cautious about all future circumstances that may lead to sin, and for other just and holy purposes. So, whatever happens to any of his elect happens by his appointment, for his glory, and for their good. – LBC

3. At such times, we must sweetly humble yourself under the hidden hand, and not chafe against it by complaining, or turning away (1 Peter 5:6)

- The bad example of Naomi
- The good example of Joseph

4. At all times, we must remember that the goal of the hidden hand is holiness, fruitfulness, and joy.

- The holiness of Joni's life
- The fruitfulness of Joni's life
- The joy of Joni's life

5. Concluding Quotes:

“The process is difficult, *but affliction isn't a killjoy*; I don't think you could find a happier follower of Jesus than me. The more my paralysis helps me get disentangled from sin, the more joy bubbles up from within. I can't tell you how many nights I have lain in bed, unable to move, stiff with pain, and have whispered near tears, “Oh, Jesus, I'm so happy. So very happy in you!” God shares his joy on his terms only, and those terms call for us to suffer, in some measure, like his Son. I'll gladly take it.” – Joni

Back in the '70s, my Bible study friend Steve Estes shared ten little words that set the course for my life: “*God permits what he hates to accomplish what he loves.*”

“Now here is the problem. How can it be that, from the aspect of the divine plan, there is immutable predetermination and accomplishment, and yet from the aspect of man's agency no coercion or compulsion, no curtailment of his freedom and responsibility, and no alleviation of his guilt? It is a mystery beyond our comprehension. We cannot so diagnose or analyze the interrelations of these correlative facts that we shall be able to see the perfectly harmonious co-working of these two distinct agencies or factors. There is convergence of both in the one act of the fall. But how they converge, how there can be the combination of divine and human agency in the same event and yet no interference with or curtailment of either, is a matter beyond our understanding. This is what we mean when we say that we are faced with an insoluble problem.” –John Murray