

Prayer and Divine Providence (Continued)

by E.M. Bounds

God's providence is at work in all things, and praying men can trust in His sovereignty and intervention in their lives.

Scripture: Genesis 50:20, Exodus 14:13, Job 1:21, Romans 8:28

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "Divine Providence"

Description

E.M. Bounds emphasizes the dual nature of God's providence, distinguishing between direct and permissive providences. He illustrates how even afflictive events, originating from wicked intentions, can serve God's purposes for His saints, as seen in the lives of Job and Joseph. Bounds highlights that true faith recognizes God's hand in all circumstances, leading to a deeper understanding of prayer's role in aligning with divine providence. He encourages believers to trust in God's overarching plan, asserting that all things work together for good to those who love Him. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a faith that sees God's providence in every aspect of life, reinforcing the importance of prayer in this relationship.

Transcript

Two kinds of providences are seen in God's dealings with men, direct providences and permissive providences. God orders some things, others he permits. But when he permits an afflictive dispensation to come into the life of I' his saint, even though it originates in a wicked mind, and it is the act of a sinner, yet before it strikes his saint and touches him, it becomes God's providence to the saint. In other words, God consents to some things in this world many of them very painful and afflictive, without in the least being responsible for them, or in the least excusing him who originates them, but such events or things always become to the saint of God the providence of God to, him. So the saint can say in each and all of these sad and distressing experiences, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Or with the psalmist, he may say, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it."

This was the explanation of all of job's severe afflictions. They came to him in the providence of God, even though they had their origin in the mind of Satan, who devised them and put them into execution. God gave Satan permission to afflict job, to take away his property, and to rob him of his children. But job did not attribute these things to blind chance, nor to accident, neither did he charge them to satanic agency, but said, "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He took these things as coming from his God, whom he feared and served and trusted.

And to the same effect are job's words to his wife when she left God out of the question, and wickedly told her husband, "Curse God and die." Job replied, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

It is no surprise under such a view of God's dealings with job that it should be recorded of this man of faith, "In all this did not job sin with his lips," and in another place was it said, "In all this job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." In nothing concerning God and the events of life do men talk more foolishly and even wickedly than in ignorantly making up their judgments on the providences of God in this world. O that we had men after the type of job, who though afflictions and privations are severe in the extreme, yet they see the hand of God in providence and openly recognize God in it.

The sequel to all these painful experiences are but illustrations of that familiar text of Paul, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Job received back more in the end than was ever taken away from him. He emerged from under these tremendous troubles with victory, and became till this day the exponent and example of great patience and strong faith in God's providences. "Ye have heard of the patience of job," rings down the line of divine revelation. God took hold of the evil acts of Satan, and worked them into his plans and brought great good out of them. He made evil work out for good without in the least endorsing the evil or conniving at it.

We have the same gracious truth of divine providence evidenced in the story of Joseph and his brethren, who sold him wickedly into Egypt and forsook him and deceived their old father. All this had its origin in their evil minds. And yet when it reached God's plans and purposes, it became God's providence both to Joseph and to the future of Jacob's descendants. Hear Joseph as he spoke to his brethren after he had revealed himself to them down in Egypt, as he traced all the painful events back to the mind of God and made them have to do with fulfilling God's purposes concerning Jacob and his posterity:

Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity on the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So that it was not you that sent me hither, but God.

Cowper's well-known hymn might well be read in this connection, one verse of which is sufficient just now:

God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform;

He plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.

The very same line of argument appears in the betrayal of our Lord by Judas. Of course it was the wicked act of an evil man, but it never touched our Lord till the Father gave his consent, and God took the evil design of Judas and worked it into his own plans for the redemption of the world. It did not excuse Judas in the least that good came out of his wicked act, but it does magnify the wisdom and greatness of God in so overruling it that man's redemption was secured. It is so always in God's dealings with man. Things which come to us from second causes are no surprise to God, nor are they beyond his control. His hand can take hold of them in answer to prayer and he can make afflictions, from whatever quarter they may come, "work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

The providence of God goes before his saints, opens the way, removes difficulties, solves problems and brings deliverances when escape seems hopeless. God brought Israel out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, his chosen leader of that people. They came to the Red Sea. But there were the waters in front, with no

crossing nor bridges. On one side were high mountains, and behind came the hosts of Pharaoh. Every avenue of escape was closed. There seemed no hope. Despair almost reigned. But there was one way open which men overlooked, and that was the upward way. A man of prayer, Moses, the man of faith in God, was on the ground. This man of prayer, who recognized God in providence, with commanding force, spoke to the people on this wise:

Fear ye not; stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

With this he lifted up his rod, and according to divine command, he stretched his hand over the sea. The waters divided, and the command issued forth, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." And Israel went over the sea dry shod. God had opened a way, and what seemed an impossible emergency was remarkably turned into a wonderful deliverance. Nor is this the only time that God has interposed in behalf of his people when their way was shut up.

The whole history of the Jews is the story of God's providence. The Old Testament cannot be accepted as true without receiving the doctrine of a divine, overruling providence. The Bible is preeminently a divine revelation. It reveals things. It discovers, uncovers, brings to light things concerning God, his character, and his manner of governing this world, and its inhabitants, not discoverable by human reason, by science or by philosophy. The Bible is a book in which God reveals himself to men. And this is particularly true when we consider God's care of his creatures and his oversight of the world, his superintendent of its affairs. And to dispute the doctrine of providence is to discredit the entire revelation of God's Word. Everywhere this Word discovers God's hand in man's affairs.

The Old Testament especially, but also the New Testament, is the story of prayer and providence. It is the tale of God's dealings with men of prayer, men of faith in his direct interference in earth's affairs, and with God's manner of superintending the world in the interest of his people and in carrying forward his work in his plans and purposes in creation and redemption.

Praying men and God's providence go together. This was thoroughly understood by the praying ones of the Scripture. They prayed over everything because God had to do with everything. They took all things to God in prayer because they believed in a divine providence which had to do with all things. They believed in an everpresent God, who had not retired into the secret recesses of space, leaving his saints and his creatures to the mercy of a tyrant, called nature, and its laws, blind, unyielding, with no regard for anyone who stood in its way. If that be the correct conception of God, why pray to him? He is too far away to hear them when they pray, and too unconcerned to trouble himself about those on earth.

These men of prayer had an implicit faith in a God of special providence, who would gladly, promptly, and readily respond to their cries for help in times of need and in seasons of distress.

The so-called "laws of nature" did not trouble them in the least. God was above nature, in control of nature while nature was but the servant of Almighty God. Nature's laws were but his own laws, since nature was but the offspring of the divine hand. Laws of nature might be suspended and no evil would result. Every intelligent person is conversant every day when he sees man overruling and overcoming the law of gravitation, and no one is surprised or raises his hand or voice in horror at the thought of nature's laws being violated. God is a God of law and order, and all his laws in nature, in providence and in grace work together in perfect accord, with no clash or disharmony.

God suspends or overcomes the laws of disease and rain often without or independent of prayer. But quite often he does this in answer to prayer. Prayer for rain or for dry weather is not outside the moral government of God, nor is it asking God to violate any law which he has made, but only asking him to give rain in his own way, according to his own laws. So also the prayer for the rebuking of disease is not a request at war with law either natural or otherwise, but is a prayer in accordance with law, even the law of prayer, a law set in operation by Almighty God as the so-called natural law which governs rain or which controls disease.

The believer in the law of prayer has strong ground on which to base his plea. And the believer in a divine providence, the companion of prayer, stands equally on strong granite foundations, from which he need not be shaken. These twin doctrines stand fast and will abide forever.

In every condition, in sickness, in health,

In poverty's vale or abounding in wealth;

At home or abroad, on the land or the sea,

As thy days may demand shall thy strength ever be.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/em-bounds/prayer-and-divine-providence-continued/>

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