

Providence and Trials - #3

All from the Hand of God

Introduction – The ‘problem of evil’ has been a philosophical debate that is as old as dirt. If God is all-powerful and perfectly good, how can there be evil in the world? Either He is not all-powerful, and the world is subject to haphazard occurrences or He is not perfectly good, which leaves us with a less-than-righteous God. But a non-omnipotent God or a non-righteous God is really an oxymoron. We are left with either rejecting God, or studying our bibles more.

Where Did These Bad Things Come From? – God is not the great fixer-upper, making good of all of our autonomous messes, wishing that we would make His life a little easier. Not only is He making good of the bad. He sovereignly decreed and providentially disposed the bad itself.

Over Groups of People – “*If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?*” (Amos 3:6)

Over Nature – “*I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.*” (Is 45:7)

Over Individuals – “*I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?*” (Ruth 1:21). When Job gave the same charge to God, we are told explicitly that Job was right (see Job 1:21-22). Even the crucifixion of Christ was determined, directed and governed by God the Father (Acts 2:22-24).

Conclusion: God is Never Surprised – God does whatever pleases Him (Psalm 135:6), and all that He is pleased to do He has planned and known from eternity (Acts 15:18). He is never reacting to events and activities in the way that humans react.

Reuben and Jacob – The classic story of God’s providence is the story of Joseph. Sold as a slave into Egypt by his brothers, thrown into a prison by his master on false charges, forgotten there by other prisoners he served well, nothing goes right for Joseph. But those who know the story, know what happens and understand why Joseph is able to say at the end, “..you meant evil for me...but God meant it for good.” (Gen 50:20). While the focus is upon Joseph and God’s providence in his life, it serves us well to dive into the middle of the story and look at Reuben and Jacob and the providence of God.

Honest Men? (Gen 42:10) – Self –deceived, they do not even realize that they are lying to the very one they have lied about for years. How often, when affliction or a trial comes upon us do we think that we do not deserve it?

Judgment, or Grace? (Gen 42: 21-22) – Reuben comes to the conviction that God has brought judgment upon them for their sin. And, according to all they know, walking by sight, it makes sense. What he cannot see at this moment is God’s gracious hand in all of this.

“What is this that God has done?” (Gen 42:28) – It is obvious. He has mercifully given them free food. But can they see this blessing?

“All these things are against me.” (Gen 42:36) – Jacob is jumping to erroneous conclusions. He does not have all the earthly facts. And he does not know the secret counsel of God. But he doubts the promises God had given him. And we are tempted likewise.

Living in Chapter 42 – Everyone loves a happy ending. But you aren’t living in Chapter 50 yet. You are living in Chapter 42. How should you then live?

Acknowledge Trials as Hard – When Paul says, “All things work together for good”, please remember, he is not saying that all things are good. Bad things happen. Painful, hurtful things that leave us with deep wounds and difficulties.

Acknowledge God as Omnipotent and Good – Sometimes, we get to see in this life why certain hard trials occurred, like Joseph. But there is always an eternal weight of glory working for us in these trials. Our thoughts must be heavenwards.

Pray God’s Promises and Boast in Your Infirmities – If it is God’s good purpose to take you through this trial, then He will strengthen you in it. And so we pray to be “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy” (Col 1:11). And when grace comes, we boast in our weaknesses, believing this perfects His strength in me (2 Cor 12:9).

The Problem of Evil – is only a problem if you look with eyes of flesh. Those with eyes of faith see real hardships producing real glory. This doesn’t remove the ache in the hardship today, but strengthens you with hope to persevere.