

## Lesson 2

# Accepting God's Providence

## Introduction

Previously we gave consideration to Isaiah's writing:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways.” This is the Lord's declaration. “For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

– Isaiah 55.8-9

We come away from this passage understanding that we are not God. We do not understand how He works, thinks, or plans, but we trust that He is working. The Scriptures teach that everything He does is done with the intent of our salvation. God always works with pure and holy motives.

## Understanding God's Eternal Purpose

For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him.

– Ephesians 1.4

Note the last part of this verse. God's plan will ultimately lead to our being *holy and blameless . . . before Him*. God is always operating with the end in mind. The opening verses in Revelation 22 describe it this way:

and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.

– Revelation 22.3-5

These two passages from Ephesians and Revelation present the beginning (before time) and the end (after time). We are obviously in between these points. Scripture has been very clear that during the great *in between* God is constantly working. We can clearly see how He worked in the Old Testament to bring Jesus to earth and die on the cross, but the New Testament assures us that His work continues throughout time to accomplish the purpose of our salvation. God's work, God's grace, and God's mercy did not stop at the cross. Passages like Ephesians 1.11b and Romans 8.28 assure us of this.

As we look back on God's work and some of His motives behind it, we may not fully understand. Sometimes the fulfillment of His plan involved the death of the wicked for the protection of the righteous.

- Why God destroyed the world through the flood, sparing only 8 people.
- Why God dealt severely with rebellion and wickedness (Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16; The destruction of Israel. *Read Jeremiah and the Minor Prophets for detailed descriptions of the suffering His people endured.*)

- Why God allowed His Son to be punished for our sin in the way He was (Isaiah 55; Matthew 26).

We can see these things clearly in the Old Testament. In the 2000 years since the cross, there are events and happenings that we attribute to the working of God by faith. Remember, ultimately these works are for the purpose of getting God’s elect and chosen ones home. God has worked, is working, and will work in the care and preservation of the Universe and God has worked, is working, and will work inside the lives of His saints for the purpose of sanctification and deliverance to their eternal home.

## What Will Your Response Be?

The best response is to follow the admonition of Solomon:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.

– Proverbs 3.5-6

We have no right to question God. We don’t know the future. God does.

## Respond in Prayer

James 4.8-9 instructs us to *draw near to God*. Paul instructs us to:

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.

– Colossians 4.2

The imperative: *devote yourselves to prayer* carries the sense of strength and intensity. As we consider the perilous times before us there should be a strong spirit among us to be praying for God’s work and care . . . for His church and for each Christian individually. Is our prayer life more about us than the will of God?

## Understand Operating from a Position of Weakness Allows God to display His Strength

Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. I have been a fool; you forced it on me. You ought to have commended me, since I am not in any way inferior to those “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing.

– 2 Corinthians 12.7b-11

A very difficult lesson Paul had to learn was that he did not have to have everything he thought he needed in order to fulfill God’s purposes. Oh, that we would learn that as well. Remember, God is working. He does not always work in ways that we understand . . . and through providence we may not always see how He is working in our life in the present. But we can trust that He will equip us with

everything we need to accomplish His purposes. The individual pieces of that equipping may not include all that we think we need to succeed. However, it’s not about us. As we operate out of our perceived weakness . . . it is actually God putting His strength on display. Do we have the type of faith that will trust God?

## **For Thought and Reflection**

1. What was God’s intention for us from before time began?
2. To what is everything leading as described in Revelation 22.3-5?
3. What do the Scriptures assure us concerning God’s work while we live in between the ultimate beginning and end points?
4. What can we learn from passages like Ephesians 1.11 and Romans 8.28?
5. How has God demonstrated His concern for the righteous?
6. What is the proper response to how God works . . . even if we do not understand the purpose behind it?
7. As we face an uncertain future, what is one of the keys to our success? (James 4.8-9)

8. What type of prayer life do you have? Could you liken yours to what Paul describes in Colossians 4.2?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What was the lesson God was teaching Paul in 2 Corinthians 12.7b-11?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. How can we personally apply what Paul was taught?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What are some of the ways God has equipped you through providence? Have you learned to practice contentment regarding the things He has not? Explain.