

Call To Worship.

Doctrine. (Providence). Eph. 1:11

God works all things according to the council of His will.

Sermon: John 21:20-25 A Different Breed Pt. III.

Theological Theme.

The general theological theme of the Gospel of John is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that in believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God we have Eternal Life in Him.

But here in the final passage of the Gospel of John we have a Doctrinal understanding that expands across every book of the Bible; it is the **Providence of God.**

That our days are in the Hands of God.

You have one man who will die in ministry and another who will die at the end of his ministry. You have Peter who will eventually be crucified, and you have John, who over a 70 year period will be sanctified.

We do not know what the future holds for our lives. For some people that looks fearful and for others it looks fun.

God's Providence over our lives is not a matter that we can overstate nor understate. Instead, it is simply a matter of our state of being.

God's Providence is a matter of His governance over **His Creation, His Circumstances, and His Certainties.**

To live in the Positive Effects of God's Providence is to live in **His Certainties.** As the NT says 'walk in the Spirit' or to 'be in the Truth.' Or to have Union with Christ.

Paul says over 30 times in the Epistles to be 'in Christ.'

It is a matter of wisdom to live by the Principles that God has laid out in His Words to us.

Living by God's revealed principles in a matter of living within His Certainties.

In God's Creation all things call out to His glory.

In His Circumstances we see the world orbit and orchestrate at His command.

In His certainties we rest in the knowledge that God's character and nature can never change. That God can never deny Himself and it is in that we find great comfort in the Providence of God.

Our days are truly in His hands. Our lives are a product of the good Grace of God.

John is a great example of this. John's life is a robust example of the Providence of God.

In respect to God's providence we can see two distinct paths of life.

All people who are following the Good Providence of God are following the same path.

Their daily activities might not overlap. Their communications might not regularly connect. But one thing is for certain, spiritually, their lives are on the same path.

That path is a path of humility. Circumstances beyond our control have a way of humbling us.

Ben Franklin once said 'after crosses and losses, men grow humbler and wiser'

I would imagine Peter has been humbled at the prospect of his martyrdom. I would imagine John is also humbled by the idea that Jesus has required a long extended ministry to endure.

Last week we looked at the Assurance of Salvation, seen in God's Boldness and God's Discipline.

Today we are going to close out the Gospel of John looking at the providence of God that should lead to our contentment of the life He has given us.

Observations about Providence in General.

1. God is in control of the direction of our lives.

'the mind of a man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps' Prov. 16:9

'the steps of a man are ordered by the LORD who takes delight in his journey' Ps. 37:23

'many plans are in a man's heart, but the purpose of the LORD will prevail' Pro. 19:21

'a man's way is not his own; no one who walks directs his own steps' Jer. 10:23

God creates man. God gives circumstances to man. God is certainly good in both His creation and His circumstances.

But often we fall into despair. ‘as surely as the sparks fly upward, man is inclined to trouble’ Job

Trials, tribulations, suffering each serve to test our mettle.

None of us questions the Providence of God when things are going well.

But whether things are going well or poorly, it is a constant temptation to fall into the same state as Peter in comparison.

2. Comparison is a common sin, even among faithful Christian servants.

We can look at our lives, evaluate the Creation of God, the Circumstances God has given us, and say, ‘Certainly I deserve better than this!’

You see this here in this passage, with Peter, **‘what about him?’** – Peter gets a direct commission about his Christian service.

Jesus tells Peter from soup to nuts, his ministry.

Instead of taking refuge in that knowledge **Peter shows dissatisfaction** and asks what about John?

When we find dissatisfaction with God’s creation, God’s circumstances, and God’s certainties, we find that we are **dissatisfied with God’s Providence.**

To be dissatisfied with God’s Providence is like a child not being content with the dinner the parents provided or the presents under the Christmas tree.

We do not create the circumstances in our life.

If we are responsible for the circumstances of our life then we are to be praised or to be blamed for those circumstances. And then **‘to us be the glory.’**

People who believe they are wholly responsible for their life circumstances end up developing a **smug, pleasantness** with who they are. Instead of a **holy discontent** with their lack of godly progress they become whole-heartedly content with who they are.

Today, I am warning against discontent with God and warning against personal contentment with self.

But we know that we have not created our own circumstances; they have come from the Creation and the Certainties of God.

Therefore, God is to be praised for the circumstances of our life. And to the degree that His grace and mercy permits, live in the Certainties that He has given to us.

To be discontent with what God has directed is to be discontent with His ruling over our lives.

This discontentment ends up leading to comparison.

Comparison comes from **competition, greed, envy, jealousy**. Really it comes from a lack of contentment.

A lack of contentment with the Creation, Circumstances and Certainties that God has brought in your life.

When Peter asks Jesus; ‘What about him?’ – the spirit behind it is the same thing they were asking before.

Who will be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven? Isn’t it enough to just be in Heaven? Wasn’t it this same sin that expelled that great worshiping angel Lucifer?

Friends, the American way is not always Christian’s way.

Success does not contain the same sanctifying ingredients as failure.

It is good to learn to work hard. It is good to learn to compete. It is good to be focused. But to compete and compare the work of our brothers and sisters in Christ is not a good thing.

Is the ministry of John and Peter, apples and oranges or chalk and cheese? Are Peter and John only poles apart? IS the ministry of John and Peter just two peas in the same pod?

You know, the thing about comparisons, is that everything has its pros and cons.

Big things have their advantages and disadvantages.

Small things have their advantages and disadvantages as well.

It might be good to be rich, until you realize people treat you differently and expect differently.

It might be bad to be poor, until you learn that God has provided enough day by day.

It might be thought good to be smart, until you realize that responsibilities of your knowledge.

The trouble with knowing more things is that you cannot unknow what you know and now you become responsible for the things that you know.

Certainly, ignorance is not always bliss, but knowledge doesn't always hold the empowering traits that some boast about it.

'To whom much is given much is required.' Lk 12:48

The Bible talks at great length about God's created things.

The spider is small but in king's palaces. Prov. 30

The lion is strong and turns away from none. Prov. 30

The strutting rooster, the male goat.

Each different and created by God for its own purpose.

It is interesting in the human experience that we are really the only created being in God's Providence that compares itself to other created beings.

Jesus Christ denounces the comparisons that come from covetousness.

Luke 12:15-21 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me' But Jesus said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?"

Then He said to them, "**Beware**, and be on your **guard against** every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.

And He told them a parable, saying,

'The land of a **rich man was very productive**. And he began reasoning to himself, saying,

"What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?"

Then he said, "This is what I will do; I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Friends, you might own your home, but rent is still due every day.

Just because things are currently going well does not mean they will always go well in your circumstances.

If things are not going well in your circumstances you can always be well in your certainties because you know who God is!

It is an interesting thing about the Capitalistic system of Economics. It certainly is the best form of Economy in the world. That's not hard to see.

But if you let an Economic system develop your outlook of your Theological System you will fall short of pleasing God.

God requires our focus daily. God requires our thanksgiving and praise daily. 'His mercies are new every morning.' Lam. 3

What I'm speaking of here requires discernment in each person's situation.

In the early America's, Puritan pastors warned against the effects of Capitalism.

Not as a bad form of economy but because it would create such a great degree of wealth that it would inspire in people a spiritual lethargy and an arrogance towards devotion to Christ.

This type of Capitalistic thinking has seeped intuitively into the minds of the American Christian where a bigger church is a better church and smaller church must be doing something wrong.

Where the Lead Pastor covets to lose his own anonymity by achieving fame and the congregation seeks to keep its anonymity by claiming Christ but never really uniting to know Him.

Sometimes, God gives people worldly success as the very mechanism that serves to blind them spiritually from their true spiritual condition.

And in other cases, God creates Bob Cratchits and Spiritual Cinderella's not because He is displeased with them, but to keep them from the very things that would corrupt them.

It seems that every American church wants to be larger than it is. You know it's such an odd trait if you think about it?

The boards and the staff will look to the left and look to the right and wonder how can we grow in number. But they forsake the question; **How can we grow in godliness?**

This capitalistic mindset is so seductive that it adds 'house to house' without ever checking with God to see if He was ok with it.

Isn't it odd? To what end should we compare?

Should we look to the John's and ask 'Why don't I get to write Revelation?'

Should we look to Peter and ask 'Will I get the glory of being a martyr or will I have to suffer through obscurity in the Aegean Sea?'

When will enough be enough? When will the eye be satisfied in its lusts, greeds, and comparisons?

The writer of Ecclesiastes says this is all vanity. It is all fleeting, not lasting.

We see that even after 3 years of ministry, the crucifixion, the resurrection and even a direct commissioning to Christian ministry there are still comparisons being made.

It is human nature to not trust in the Providence of God. We need reminders regularly that God is in control and is directing the lives of His people.

Let me give you an example that I think probably happens more often than not.

I had a friend who was a Captain with me in the Army. And you get to a place in the Army where you can do certain things to try to accelerate your promotion to the next rank. And the man was telling me about how his wife was really trying to get him to do these various things to get him promoted faster.

I asked him, 'why is your wife so concerned with whether you get promoted faster?' 'He said she feels like I don't make enough money.' I said so let me get this straight, your wife wants you to take on more responsibility so she can spend more money? He started laughing. I said 'man if she can live off 50 she ain't going to be able to live off 60.'

A Lack of contentment has given men more coronaries than martyrdoms have given crucifixions.

Lack of contentment has led to marriage division (Matt. 18), inheritance disputes (Lk 12), irrational church disagreements (Corinth/Galatia), failures in business merger.

Lack of contentment floods our legal system with unnecessary disputes. Problems that could have been settled over sourdough and Syrah.

This lack of contentment mindset has developed men who have never grinded an axe but have an axe to grind.

Women who'd rather take their man to the cleaners rather than be content with taking care of their man.

Heap onto this the Consumer Nature of our culture and economy and you have an accelerate dumped upon an already tempted mind.

It is these problems that cause a loss of love. Watching peace blow away like an autumn leaf.

Jeremiah Burroughs writes in the Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment that **'it is our duty as a Christians to be well skilled in the mystery and glory of Christian contentment.'**

All this to say, that lack of contentment leads to comparison.

Comparison rarely leads to meaningful spiritual growth.

Instead, comparison leads to a spirit of competition.

That leads to divisions and any division that is not based on standing for the Truth of God is merely a sinful division.

3. God's Control of our lives should result in resounding contentment.

To know that God has created all things, God has brought about our Circumstances, and to be Certain of God's goodness and mercy should result in contentment.

BUT, In any social setting people can very quickly begin to compare their life with all the people in their setting.

Q: Are we doing good? They base whether they are doing good, based on how well they are doing in comparison to others.

This example is what the Pharisee did when he came to church. I tithed, I prayed, I did all of these various things. The Publican simply beat his breast pleading for God's mercy.

The Publican was not doing superficially as well as the Pharisee, but from a Divine standpoint, the Pharisee was doing horrible spiritually, in comparison to the Publican.

People will say in their own mind, well I am not as bad off as this person, or I do not do what so-in-so does and therein, **justify themselves based on their social comparisons.**

Remember that **Almighty God does not evaluate our lives comparatively with other people**, but instead God judges us with the actions and attitudes, with the traits, talents, and tools that He has given us.

Further, Jesus shows us time and again in the Parables that He is neither a **classic Socialist** looking to re-distribute goods, but we also see that He is no eager Capitalist looking to have people acquire mass sums to themselves.

Instead, Jesus gives us a principle to take that life God has given us, the cards God has dealt us, and whether the cards are good or bad, play the game the way that God has designed it to be played.

The Lord Jesus sets a pattern for us in the Parables that all that we have has been given to us by God and by-God we better do our best with what He has given us.

Peter gets about 30 more years. John gets about 60 more years. And Peter leaves the vineyard 30 years earlier but he gets the same prize!

Peter dies on an old cross and John dies in old age. But the age-old lesson is that God calls us to serve Him and He determines when that begins and when that ends.

God also determines the outcomes and results.

Something we have not looked at in great depth is the person of John.

Bio Sketch of John.

John is the son of Zebedee, a fisherman. John is the brother of James, another Apostle.

John is the only Apostle to die of natural causes.

John was known as The Evangelist.

Known as John of Patmos, John the Elder, and The Beloved Disciple.

To me, one of the most interesting facts about John is a small segment I found at the back of the **Treasury of Scripture Knowledge**.

John is known as the Apostle of Love. Of course, all of the Apostles were filled with the Love of Christ, for Christ, and for Christ's people, but John was specifically identified as this humble servant.

According to Church Tradition, John did not go to Ephesus to Pastor until after the death of Mary, Jesus' mother.

Jesus had told John ‘behold your mother’ as He was dying on the cross. John took responsibility for the care of Jesus’ mother.

In Tertullian's writing titled, **Prescription for Heretics**, he records that John was boiled in a vat of oil prior to his exile to the island of Patmos.

However, according to Tertullian, the boiling oil had no effect on John and all of the eye witnesses at the Coliseum became Christian converts due to the amazing miracle they witnessed.

John was a man of great love, however, that does not mean he was without his opponents.

John’s famous disciples, Polycarp, Irenaeus, and St. Ignatius record that John upheld a strict opposition to Cerinthus.

Cerinthus was a Gnostic heretic, believed by many to be the reason for the divisions that inspired the letter to the Galatians and the resulting Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15.

Cerinthus preached that Christ was not the son of God, that he was merely a man and numerous other theological heresies that also inspired the apologetic themes of Epistles like Colossians and 1st John.

Those wicked men who opposed Christ, also oppose His servants, and Cerinthus was one of those.

While entering a bathhouse in Ephesus, John was alerted that Cerinthus might be inside.

Polycarp records that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us flee, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the Truth, is within.”

John was known as the Apostle of Love but not an apostle of compromising the Truth in order to uphold false ideals of love.

Polycarp and Irenaeus agreed strongly, that it was John’s deep conviction that Divine Judgment was looming over the head of Cerinthus.

The Disciples of the Apostles held the belief that public affiliation with such false teachers was a horror that they could not endure. Given these people had the imminent judgment of God over their heads.

2 John 1:10-11 'If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.'

John gives a warning to not give funding to the advancement of the teaching of False Teachers.

Titus 3:10 'reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.'

We know how to handle False teachers. Those who misrepresent the Gospel.

But what about **competitiveness and comparison** in Christian ministry?

Q: Shouldn't we find contentment in God's Providence for our lives?

Competitiveness and Comparison are not loving and truthful methods of Christian discipleship.

Comparisons like, I brought this many people to faith and I baptized this many converts...These comparisons are foolish and carnal.

These comparisons do not please God.

These comparisons are the seedbeds of division. Sectarianism.

Jesus says to Peter,

'what is that to you?' John 21:22

But in all of this, John has seen a lot of life. John has seen a lot of Christ.

It's one thing to be 90, it's another to have walked with Jesus your whole adult life.

John's wisdom in writing reaches the apexes of Christian Theology.

In the final remarks of John's Gospel in **The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge** the comments of Jerome are referenced.

Q: What does John do after this engagement with Jesus Christ?

It is agreed by the early church fathers that ‘After the ascension of our Lord, John returned with the other apostles to Jerusalem, and partook of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, by which he was eminently qualified for the office of an Evangelist and Apostle.

After the death of Mary, the mother of Christ, which is supposed to have taken place about **fifteen years** after the crucifixion, and probably after the council held in Jerusalem about AD 49-50 at which he was present, John is said by ecclesiastical writers to have proceeded to Asia Minor, where he formed and presided over seven churches in seven different cities, but chiefly resided at Ephesus.

Then he was banished by the emperor Domitian, in the fifteenth year of his reign, AD 95, to the isle of Patmos in the Aegean sea, where he wrote the Apocalypse/Revelation. During the time of John’s exile, the Emperor Domitian was assassinated by a group of rogue Praetorian Guards which was followed by the accession of Nerva. After these event, John was called by from exile, and returned to Ephesus where he wrote his Gospel and Epistles.

John died in the hundredth year of his age..

This was during the 3rd year of the reign of the emperor Trajan.

This would have given John, 70 years worth of faithful Christian ministry.

It is generally believed that John was the youngest of all the Apostles. And survived all of them.

Jerome writes in his commentary on Galatians 6, that John continued preaching even when he was so feeble that he was carried into the assembly.

And though he was unable to deliver a long discourse, his custom was to speak at every meeting and say “**My dear children, love one another.**”

Q: Why is it that one Christian ministry lives to 65 and another to 100? Why is it that one man is crucified and one dies of old age?

v. 22 ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!’”

Was one man better than the other? Was one man more obedient?

The answer to life and its beginning, middle, and end is in God’s Providence.

Our days are in His hands.

We are not our own, we have been bought with a price.

That price tag is ‘no respecter of persons.’

Rumors in the Christian church.

v. 23 ‘Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?’”

Went out among the brethren. – a rumor among professed Christians.

The pagans don’t care what is going to happen with John. They are disinterested. But the Christian church, as soon as it starts with carnal comparisons, it starts with careless rumors.

As soon as the brethren stop the task of evangelism and discipleship, it starts with rumors.

Matt. 23:15 ‘Woe to you scribes and Pharisees you travel sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.’ Jesus Christ to false converts

Jesus does not say that John is not going to die. Jesus simply used that to draw the point to an extreme.

People like this would prefer to take literally a literary device of hyperbole than to take literally the plain and clear mandate of ‘Follow Me.’

In all of this, John is using the end of this Gospel to correct a rumor that had circulated for years.

In the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge it is recording that after 100 years of life and 70 years of ministry in Christ, John’s greatest wisdom is to **love one another**.

It’s hard to love someone who you do not spend time with.

It’s hard to love someone whom you do not communicate with.

It’s hard to love someone who is different than you.

It’s an interesting thing about the body of Christ, no two members are the same.

No two body parts are the same. Each is different, but each must operation in unison otherwise there is an interruption to health.

Unity is a discipline of the Christian faith. Unity is not inherent in the selfish nature of human beings.

We live in what I would estimate as the **most selfish generation** this would have ever seen.

We have even invented technologies for the purpose of fueling selfishness.

In our age we have selfie-sticks and self-directed IRAs. We have self-guided tours, self-selected entertainment, self-chosen healthcare.

Any person can take any selfish route they want to take. And everyone is happy and everyone is ok, so long as we do nothing and say nothing to interfere with that persons self-directed route.

Unity is a discipline that a Christian chooses to live within.

Unity is not founded on compromising convictions, but is founding on compromising selfish desires.

Unity is a matter of combining the combined strengths of the body of Christ and putting those strengths on display for the world to see the image of Christ.

‘every happy family is happy for the same reasons, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own unique way.’ Leo Tolstoy

The same goes for church. ‘all church unity is for the same reason but the reasons for church disunity abound beyond explanation.’

I’ve known people who have chosen Disunity for a variety of reasons. None of them justified.

I’ve known people who have chosen **disunity because of disagreements**. That’s what you call pettiness.

I’ve known people who have chosen disunity because of doctrine which they contradict by their very disunity.

That’s called hypocrisy.

I’ve known people who have chosen disunity because of personal motives.

That’s called selfishness.

Friends to have love among a church, you must have unity, and the only way to have unity, IS NOT through looking the same, dressing alike, cheering for the same sports teams.

Unity in the church requires love, but that unity is found in a **common love for Jesus Christ.**

If you love Christ, you'll love His people. If you love Christ, you'll even love those who are not His people!

But to love Christ, and to Love Christ's people, and to even love those people who are not Christ's people, DOES NOT start with Unity and it does not start with Love.

It starts with HUMILITY. Lowliness. Meekness. Graciously by-passing your own selfish agenda.

Humility DOES NOT mean you sheepishly act like you do not know what is right. Or that you do not know the answer to a question.

Humility DOES NOT mean you differ in responsibility.

Humility DOES NOT come up with unsolvable problems in order to get out of obvious work.

Q: Why does it seem like in family, church, business, and politics there seems to be the most amount of divisions that occur?

Why do divisions occur in domestic families and church families? Why do divisions occur in businesses?

In every organization you crest a period of time where character is being developed.

You could call it an **Inertia point.** At this point of inertia, there are those who remain on the path of character development and there are those who fall away.

Inertia points are found in the places that have the most at stake.

The places that have the most at stake require the most virtue.

The places that have the most to offer positive change require the most positive change.

The reason we so often see an absence of love is because of an influx of selfishness.

Humility that we are Created by God, that God has brought about our Circumstances, and Confidence in Who God is gives us certainty.

This certainty of Gods' creation, God's circumstances, leads us to be content in the life God has given us.

The Creation, the Circumstances, and the Certainties. (The Providence of God.)

Transition to Communion.

1 Corinthians 11.

Lord, keep us in the faith.

Closing Prayer.

Small Group Questions.

1. Is God's desire for our life to compete and compare our lives with others or to be content with the circumstances that God has given us?
2. Over the course of your life can you see how through God's Creation, Circumstances, and Certainties; His Providence has directed your life?
3. Can you see any places where humility would help with finding contentment in the life God has given you?
4. Is following Christ (His person and work), sufficient for your life, or do you struggle with adding other things onto the name of Christ to make it more unique and differentiated from others?
5. How can we encourage each other to be content with the circumstances God has given each of us?