

Series: **God is...So What?**

Today's Title: **"The God Over History"**

November 27, 2022 – *Selected Passages* – Sermon 15 of 16

Objective: To comfort people that God is in sovereign control over all things and to submit our life to His will.

Opening Prayer

Generations ago – when our country was founded, the common understanding of God among the masses was clearer than with people today.

In 1693 – 329 years ago – Roger Williams, who had been banished from Massachusetts, bought some land which would become the state of Rhode Island.

In this land he would later establish a settlement to be a place of religious and political freedom.

He later named this city: Providence.

Why?

Because even after a period of suffering and persecution in his own life, he still believed in God's control over history – or what theologians refer to as the 'Providence of God'.

Most people today, when they go to Providence – or when they hear about Providence, Rhode Island – they don't think of Divine Providence – but it's simply a name of a particular city – with no significant meaning outside of the city itself.

But Roger Williams understood an important truth.

He understood the reality of God – and how God has decreed all things – and God actively works to the end He has decreed.

Definitions:

“Providence may be defined as that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world and directs all things to their appointed end.”

- Louis Berkhof

“God’s eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His glory, He has foreordained whatever comes to pass.”

“His eternal decision rendering certain all things which shall come to pass.”

(Understanding Christian Theology, by Charles R. Swindoll & Roy B. Zuck, p. 209)

Let’s take a look at 4 aspects of this attribute / perfection of God – that He is providential – that He is sovereign over all of history – His decree which is played out through history.

1. The idea of random chance...
2. The movement of history...
3. The problem of evil and pain in life in light of God’s providential decree...
4. Our life in light of God’s will.

Providence or fate?

Instead of believing in a Sovereign God who is in control of the movements of history, what is more common today is the idea of ‘fate’ – or ‘karma’.

In today’s broadly educated population, most believe in a random ordering of events that determines what happens in life.

Belief in ‘fate’ - or a belief in chance – is a belief in nothing more than luck (good or bad).

This is what many believe – that life is nothing more than a compilation of random events.

What happens in life is simply a matter of fate – or chance.

But the Bible gives us a very different understanding of life.

Isaiah 46:9b-10

“...I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose...’”

From Scripture, we know that God is in control – He is a God who is over all of history.

This is a primary implication of His sovereignty – His control over both large and small events.

We’re told (Daniel 2:21) God “...removes kings and sets up kings...”.

Psalm 22:28

“For kingship belongs to the LORD, and He rules over the nations.”

Proverbs 16:33 *(NLT)*

“We may throw the dice,
but the LORD determines how they fall.”

Over the physical world...

Psalm 135:6

“Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.”

But God’s providence not only extends to the large movements of history, but also to the seemingly insignificant movements that are largely unnoticed.

Matthew 10:29-31

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.
But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.
Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Regarding our life – the days of our life...

Job 14:5

“You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer.”

Psalm 139:16

“Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

Romans 8:28

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”

On the opposite side of ‘fate’ or ‘chance’ is the secular belief that each of us is in total control of our own destiny.

We are the ones who decide what our life will be – what we will do – how successful we will be in life.

Conscious or not, this kind of thinking is highly arrogant and those who think this are making themselves to be mini-deities – believing they are able to exercise dominion and sovereign control over the contingencies of life.

But the Bible reveals the truth about our life’s destiny.

Proverbs 16:9

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”

Acts 17:28

“In Him (God) we live and move and have our being...”

Job 12:10

“In His hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.”

So, the Bible clearly teaches God is in control of history. God is sovereign – and He has providentially decreed what will happen in history – to accomplish His good and perfect will.

The implication of this truth is there is no such thing as ‘fate’ or ‘chance’ – for if there were things in this world which fell outside of God’s providence, and it was simply up to ‘fate’ or random chance for something to occur – then God would not be sovereign – and His providence would be limited by something outside of Himself.

God’s control over history.

We’ve already touched on this by seeing God’s control over kings and kingdoms – His control over nations and who leads them.

But God’s sovereign control over history includes all of our lives – and nothing falls outside of His providence.

Revelation 4:11

“Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created.”

As Creator of all things – all things fall under God’s control.

The suffering of Jesus and the injustice He endured was not outside of God’s plan.

Acts 4:27-28

“...for truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place.”

Those of us who have been called to faith and we responded by putting our faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins – God is working in and through us – to accomplish His will.

Ephesians 1:11

“In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will...”

Some might protest on this point – and ask,

- *‘What about free will?’*
- *‘Am I just a robot – controlled by God?’*
- *‘If God has decreed what will happen in life – I’m not responsible for my actions.’*

While this thought is understandable, it is wrong – false.

“God’s decree does not annul human responsibility.”

(Understanding Christian Theology, by Charles R. Swindoll & Roy B. Zuck, p. 211)

He does use evil acts to further His purposes.

But God’s sovereign control over history does not remove our responsibility for our actions and decisions.

We see this in the following passages:

Acts 2:23 – Peter preaching on Pentecost

“...Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

Luke 22:22 – Jesus is speaking

“The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed.
But woe to that man who betrays Him!”

That is a clear statement by Jesus of the Father’s decree for the Son’s betrayal and death – but Jesus clearly states the one who does the betraying will face judgment!

Perhaps the clearest – and most popular passage to speak to this issue is found in reference to Joseph – and his brother’s evil actions of beating him, lying to their father, Jacob, about his well-being, and selling him into slavery.

After Jacob dies, Joseph’s brothers are fearful that he will take revenge against them – but Joseph knows the big picture – he knows that God was at work the entire time.

Genesis 50:20

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

Joseph’s brothers carried the full weight of their sin. But God is sovereign – even over evil and sinful actions – and He will use all things to accomplish His will.

God’s will in difficulty.

One of the greatest challenges to faith is pain and loss in life.

It is interesting what you see when you study the early Church – and the early centuries of the Church – and when you look at the modern-day Church in countries where it is illegal to follow Christ and the punishment is often severe torcher or even death.

What you see are Christians who are faithful in the midst of horrific dangers.

When faced with these terrible threats due to their faith, they are even more determined to live for Christ and to tell others about their Savior!

However, for those of us who have been blessed to live in a nation where we have enjoyed freedom of religion, when we suffer in some measure because of our faith, or in spite of our faith, many begin to question God and His concern for them or His ability to care for them. But this is vitally important for us to know.

God uses suffering and difficulty in life to mature us – and to bring Him glory.

1 Peter 3:17

“For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.”

It goes without saying – but needs to be said – that Christians throughout history have suffered in the realities of living in a fallen world where pain, sickness,

conflict, injustice, disease, and death is our common experience.

But most Christians throughout history have suffered because of their faith – not just from the fallenness of our world.

- Banished from their families.
- Spouses divorced them due to their faith.
- Children grow up and reject the faith of the parents.
- Unjustly fired from their job.
- Rumors and lies spread because of faith.
- On the more severe side... attacked and assaulted.
- Property vandalized
- Martyred because of Jesus.

We must develop a theology of suffering.

A theology – an understanding of God – and how human suffering in general – and the Christian’s suffering in particular – work in relation to our faith and the promises and providence of God.

1 Peter 4:19

“Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

Persecution – and the resultant suffering – was the ‘normal’ experience of Christians in the early centuries of the Church.

But even before the Church, the people of God suffered.

One of the blatant examples was Job – who lost everything.

But his response is instructive – and humbling for us.

Job 1:20-22

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.

And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”

Job’s suffering and loss was not outside of God’s providence.

In fact, God has used Job’s suffering for the past 3,000+ years – to encourage the hearts of those who follow Him.

Job has been an example and inspiration for millions of people throughout the ages who have suffered through the realities of a fallen world – or the realities of persecution against the people of God.

In **2 Corinthians 12** Paul shares his suffering from what he calls a “thorn in the flesh” (vs. 7) and that he prayed to God for relief – but God’s answer was essentially **‘No’**.

But He (God) said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (vs. 9-10)

There is a purpose in our suffering – not only to mold us to be more Christlike – because of His suffering.

But we suffer so that the power of Christ may be more visible – more obvious from our own power!

In suffering Christ is honored – glorified.

Knowing God’s will for your life.

This is a very common question / desire I have heard over the years as people try and live in obedience to God, they want to know what God’s will for them is – but this is often very confusing to figure out.

The Bible uses a variety of terms for what we commonly refer to as ‘*God’s will*’:

- God’s decree...
- His good pleasure...
- His counsel...
- God predestined...
- His foreknowledge...
- His eternal purpose...

In a general sense you may ask:

“What is the will of God?”

Or... more specifically...

“How can I know the will of God for my life?”

“Is it God’s will for me to marry this person?”

“Is it God’s will for me to take this job and move the family?”

“Is it God’s will for us to buy this house?”

“Is it God’s will for me to go into ministry?”

Ephesians 5:17

“...do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

This is something every Christian should understand – how to know the will of God in a general sense and a specific sense for your life.

We see Paul referring to God’s control over the details of his life when he tells the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 4:19

“But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills...”

We know from other passages that God’s will – His desire is for all people to be saved.

1 Timothy 2:4 (also 2 Peter 3:9)

“...God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

But what about you?

1 Thessalonians 4:3a

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification...”

The Bible is the self-revelation of God – and in the Bible He reveals His moral law – how we should live –

how we should treat others – the attitude we should have toward others.

It is God’s will for you to learn what the Bible teaches – and obey what God has said.

We can sum up the entire law of God into 2 commands:

Matthew 22:37-40 – *Jesus is speaking*

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

To learn the law of God – to learn what the Bible says about how to live is a life-long pursuit.

We don’t have to make it more complicated than that!

For instance:

1 Thessalonians 4:3

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality...”

This is a significant command for our culture.

What about who you should marry?

What about a job change?

Moving the family?

Major purchases – house, car?

Going into ministry?

Get into the Bible – learn the principles taught in Scripture about how to live – and apply those principles into each area of life.

Marriage:

1. Are they a Christian (not just a label)?
2. Do they pursue the will of God in their life?
3. Do they submit to the authority of the Bible?
4. Do you love them? Are you attracted to them?
5. Are there any major concerns about them or their family?
6. Seek Godly counsel from trusted Christians in your life.
7. If there are no red flags... then go for it!!!!

Each of the other questions about God's will – follow the same kind of process.

Learn what the Bible teaches – submit to the Bible's teaching – and apply the Bible's teaching to your decision process.

Apply it... So What?

Here are 4 quick things to take away from what we've talked about.

1. No such thing as fate or chance.

The Bible clearly teaches God is in control of history.

He is sovereign – and has providentially decreed what will happen in history – to accomplish His good and perfect will.

The implication of this truth is there is no such thing as ‘fate’ or ‘chance’ – for if there were things in this world which fell outside of God’s providence, and it was simply up to ‘fate’ or random chance for something to occur – then God would not be sovereign – and His providence would be limited by something outside of Himself.

2. God is working through the good and bad events of history.

Don’t be surprised – don’t let your faith be shaken – when you see evil in the world.

When certain people rise to power – when the powerful abuse their position – don’t doubt God.

You can be confident that God is at work – using both good and evil for His purposes.

3. God is sovereign in your pain and loss.

Pain and loss are part of our fallen world.

Pain and loss are also the common experience of those who follow Christ.

Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you.” (John 15:18)

God uses our weakness – our struggles – to mature us – and to reveal His power in our life.

Embrace your suffering – worship God in response to your suffering – and He will form you into the image of His Son.

4. Obeying God's Word = Being in God's will.

God has revealed Himself in the Bible – and He has revealed His will.

Certain aspects of His will are secret – but much of His will He has made known in Scripture.

Learn what the Bible says about life.

Obey what it says about how we should live.

When you do this – you will find yourself in God's will!

Close in prayer