



## What's Going On?

*Proverbs 20:24 A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?*

- In yesterday's devotion we considered how it can happen that people ruin their lives by their own sinful choices and rather than repent, they decide to rage against God for what's happened to them. Today Solomon's words ask us to ponder the other side of that equation: how would God have us respond when life takes an unexpected or confusing, maybe even a painful or tragic turn—when you don't get that big promotion, when your fiancé breaks up with you, when you wipe out on your bike, or get a troubling diagnosis? Honestly God's governance and guidance of this world will always be something of a paradox for us, something we cannot fully understand with our reason or wrap our minds around. Nonetheless the Scriptures do lay down some important truths about God's providence, truths that give us assurance and hope and rest, even if our limited intelligence and time-bound mortality cannot grasp them all. A devotion like this is too short to delve into this topic in great depth, but God-willing even this cursory exploration will give us all plenty to ponder and make us glad that we have a God who is so much bigger than us!
- Truth #1: God is in control of all things. Our creeds clearly confess that God made the heavens and the earth—all things seen and unseen. All power and life are derived from him for "from him and to him and through him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). There is nothing that happens on any scale—either subatomic or supernova—in the spiritual or material realms—that he does not allow to happen.
- Truth #2: God is perfect. He is not the author of evil and he does no wrong (cf. James 1:13). Sin and death and the corruption and hardships of life entered God's perfect creation when Satan fell and successfully tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God's command. Ever since God has been limiting what sin and evil can do. He curbs gross immorality through his commands and punishments. As we see in the life of Job God sets specific limits on exactly how far evil can go (cf. Job ch. 1 & 2). We have his twin promises that he will never let us be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13), nor will he allow anything in heaven or earth to separate us from his love and forgiveness in Christ (Romans 8:38-39). In the suffering and death of our Savior, God proved once and for all that he makes even sin and hurt and evil and death accomplish his good and perfect, loving and eternal plans to rescue his children from this sin-cursed world (Rom. 8:28).
- Truth #3: God's perfect control does not negate our free will or individual responsibility. We Christians are not fatalists who throw up our hands and say, "Life is all predetermined, all decided! Nothing I do matters anyway!" Yes, in his timelessness and perfect knowledge our God instantly and effortlessly knows everything that has happened, will happen, or ever could happen, and as needed he graciously intervenes to guide all things according to his perfect will. Yet at the same time he is continually calling and encouraging us to action in his Word—to preach the gospel, to go and make disciples, to pray, to be salt and light, to help the needy and the stranger, to struggle against sin and temptation and despair. In short to do the good that he has prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10). In the end each one of us will stand before God and given an accounting for our lives (2 Cor. 5:10). So we believers strive to live wisely, responsibly, and righteously, at the same time knowing that we have nothing to fear because all our sins and failures and short-comings have been washed away in the blood of Jesus (Rev. 7:14).

- So then are you confused, even shocked at how your life is playing out? Are you troubled by what others have done to you, by events that are beyond your control? Solomon was the smartest human being to have ever lived, and would say to you and me, “Join the club.” He admits that no one can understand their own way. That’s where faith and trust come in. In faith we lay our heartache, our questions, our pains, and our fears on our good, big, and gracious God, whose Son went the way of the cross for us, so that we will always know the way to God and share in the salvation he has planned for us.

Prayer: Sovereign Lord, you rule all things in wisdom and kindness and power and love. Give me grace in Jesus to trust in your good plans and guidance for my life and to live each day to your praise and glory. Amen.