

Class 4, DARK PROVIDENCE, Comfort for God's Suffering Saints and Providence

Tonight I want us to give some thought to DARK PROVIDENCE.

What do we mean by DARK PROVIDENCE?

1. Dark Providence – Those times in our lives when circumstances happen that bring us disappointment, give us pain, and we feel like God is not with us or is not blessing us. We are prone when life is hard and trouble comes to think doubtful and even untrue thoughts about God and everything else related to life. Emotional and physical pain is not the context in which to rightly reason about any important matter. When afflictions come, when we are sick, grieve, or struggle, we are prone to ask some very important questions. Why did this happen? Why did this happen to me? Why did this happen now? What does this mean in the large scheme of life? Where is God in my pain? What is God doing, if anything? How am I supposed to respond to my situation? If we do not have the correct theological foundation when we ask these questions, and if we do not have emotional balance and a spiritual perspective, then we will probably misunderstand things and create the wrong answers to these and other questions.
2. Dark Providence – Times of Dark Providence are times of trial, but they can also be times of great temptation from the evil one. We need to remember that Satan will use any dark time to tempt us and seek to undermine our faith in God and in the truth in Christ. There are five main ways that Satan tempts the Christian when dark providences come.
 - 1) Temptation – temptation to complain to God
 - 2) Temptation – temptation to disbelieve in God's sovereign control
 - 3) Temptation – temptation to disbelieve in God's goodness and care
 - 4) Temptation – temptation to lose hope
 - 5) Temptation – to get angry and bitter

Christian Living in Dark Providence:

1. **DARK PROVIDENCE AND MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL TWISTEDNESS:** Dark providences often twist our thinking about God, about ourselves, and about life's realities; dark providences create a context whereby emotions can be damaged and the mind going dark. There are a number of aspects to our human experience during dark providences; we must face these challenges to our faith and right approach to God and His truth during times of trouble. Here are some human inner struggles we may face that must be handled during such times.
 - 1) Human weakness
 - 2) Mental distortion
 - 3) Emotional numbness (at best) or negativity (at worst)

Christians are not immune to these human hardships and difficulties, and we are not immune to the temptations that come to us in such times.

2. **THE CHRISTIAN, DARK PROVIDENCE, AND THE BIBLE:** In times of dark providences, faith must feed on the nourishment of God's Word. God's Word, the Bible, is a living thing; it will strengthen and assist us in achieving some understanding by being a means of God's grace. This means that the right understanding and application of biblical truths to one's life in

such times will become a conduit for the grace of God to invade the human soul and bring help. How does the Bible do this?

- 1) The Bible focuses our minds on foundational truth so we can think rightly again.
 - (1) When we hurt, we cannot think rightly.
 - (2) The theological and moral teachings of the Bible (including the promises of God in the gospel of Christ to all who believe in Him) form a powerful antidote for our aching and hurting hearts. The Lord gives grace to the suffering soul through the teaching of the Scripture concerning the life and ultimate reality in Christ.
- 2) The Bible allows truth to soak into our souls where emotional healing can occur.
 - (1) The Holy Spirit guides us and helps us think aright about the Bible and it's teaching.
 - (2) The Holy Spirit enables the truth to get down deep inside of our souls where the truth can most help us.
- 3) The Bible gives us a window through which we can see truth that is beyond us.
 - (1) When we hurt, we cannot seem to understand or reason well. We desperately want to understand. But we don't truly know what we need to know that we might understand what we need to understand during difficult times. The Bible forms the window through which we are able to see ourselves, our lives, and our God for our good and peace.
 - (2) The Bible is consistent on these vital and life-changing truths that relate to our problems as we are experiencing them as disciples of Jesus Christ in a fallen world.
- 4) The Bible serves as a foundation upon which to rest our hopes and fight our fears.
 - (1) The Bible houses all the promises of God to those who trust in Christ.
 - (2) When we turn to the Bible in our pain, we find these promises speaking to us in the power of the Holy Spirit to aid us and give us peace.

3. **DARK PROVIDENCE AND PRAYER:** Prayer is for the soul.

- 1) Prayer lets the soul speak to God.
 - (1) We need to share our soul's thoughts when we hurt.
 - (2) We need to tell our pain to Jesus; we need to be honest, open, and teachable.
 - (3) We increase our fellowship with Jesus when we pray during trouble.
 - (4) Some suggestions concerning praying during dark providences:
 - a. Pray to God through the gospel work of Jesus Christ as mediator.
 - b. Pray honestly; let your soul come out. Pour out your heart to the Lord.
 - c. Prayerfully confess the truth, even when you don't feel it.
 - d. Confess before God truth about His nature and His providence.
 - e. Turn over to God your deepest fears and concerns, then trust Him.
- 2) Prayer lets the mind ruminate on God's truth.
 - (1) Pray Scripture
 - (2) Pray with theological truth in your prayer

4. **DARK PROVIDENCE AND GOD'S LOVE:** Soak the soul in the love of God.

- 1) Never allow yourself to disbelieve the love of God for you.
 - (1) Confess the love of God even if you don't believe He loves you.
 - (2) Remember that you believe the truth in your soul even when you don't think you do.
- 2) Feed your love for God in praise and submission to His will.
 - (1) Let God's love for you inspire your love for Him manifested in praise to Him.
 - (2) Let God's love for you, and your love for Him, find footing in obedience.

5. **DARK PROVIDENCE AND GRATEFUL PRAISE TO GOD:** Think about all that God is doing that is good.
 - 1) Remind yourself that God is good all the time, because He is completely good.
 - (1) Review God's goodness in His nature (systematic theology)
 - (2) Review the theology of God's goodness expressed in covenant love to His elect.
 - 2) Make a list of everything God has done for you in the past.
 - (1) Reviewing past blessings is a wonderful way to relight the fire of gratitude.
 - (2) Giving thanks for past blessings instigates a mindset to look for present blessings.
 - 3) Make a list of all the good you see God doing right now, beginning with small mercies.
 - (1) Write down in your journal every single good thing you see in your life right now.
 - (2) Give thanks to God for these small and large blessings.
 - (3) Begin to thank and praise God for His goodness to you.
 - (4) Allow your soul to rise in loving submission to God because of His goodness.

6. **DARK PROVIDENCE AND ETERNAL GLORY:** Think about heaven and the glory there.
 - 1) Live in the NOW, but think about ETERNITY.
 - 2) Imagine how God will give you greater wisdom of this circumstance in heaven.
 - 3) Review Isaac Watts' and Jonathan Edwards' comments on heaven.

7. **DARK PROVIDENCE AND SUBMISSION TO GOD:** Yield yourself unreservedly to Christ for His will and glory to be accomplished.
 - 1) Yield yourself to God's wisdom.
 - (1) God knows what He is doing.
 - (2) God's wisdom is perfect for you and your life.
 - 2) Yield yourself to God's plan.
 - (1) God has a plan for every child of God.
 - (2) This plan is to make us like Jesus.
 - (3) Everything that happens to us fits into this plan.
 - (4) This plan is the absolute BEST for us!
 - 3) Yield yourself to God's will.
 - (1) Yielding to God means that you believe that He is working for your good.
 - (2) Yielding to God means that you believe His way is best.
 - (3) Yielding to God means that even if you don't understand, God's plan makes sense.
 - (4) Yielding to God means acknowledging God is in control, even when you are not.

CROSS PROVIDENCES = DARK PROVIDENCES

Thomas Brooks in his book, *"Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices,"* says the following about the cross-providence of God (i.e., those experiences in this life that give us pain and hardship, even though they are God's will for us): (Brooks gives this information in order to help us fight against Satan's lies when we are hurting)

1. Many things may be against what we want, but they (all things in providence) are good for our souls.
2. Even though God may allow painful circumstances in a Christian's life, at the same time God's heart is full of love for that Christian.

3. God only allows cross-providence pain, difficulty, and hardship, because God intends to bring about a noble and wonderful good for Christians.
4. All the cross-providences that God allows in Christian lives will further us in our way to heaven and to our journey of happiness.
5. No trouble or affliction that we meet with as we live righteously for God will ever truly and ultimately hurt or harm Christians.

PREDESTINATION AND PROVIDENCE

The Importance of Believing in Predestination in Dark Providences

We might ask ourselves this question: “Do we have trouble believing in divine providence during hard times in life? If so, why is this? Is there some belief problem in us that keeps us from grasping onto this glorious truth?” I believe there is a belief, a doctrine, from the Scripture that we must surely understand and embrace that helps us to benefit from providence in our lives. This doctrine is the DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION.

The following comes from an article written by Jerome Zanchius (1516-1590, Zanchius was trained by the Italian Reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli).

Zanchius believed that without a belief in DIVINE PREDESTINATION we could never believe in DIVINE PROVIDENCE. Zanchius quotes Romans 8:28-29, then says, “Without a due sense of predestination, we shall lack the surest and the most powerful inducement to patience, resignation, and dependence on God under every spiritual and temporal affliction.” Zanchius then gives the following outline of ideas, concepts, and thoughts that integrates our thinking on this topic: (each point leads to the next; each succeeding point is built on the previous one)

1. *There most certainly exists an almighty, all wise, and infinitely gracious God (Hebrews 11:6).*
2. *He has given me in times past and is giving me at present (if I had but eyes to see it) many signal intimations of His love to me, both in a way of providence and grace (Ephesians 1).*
3. *This love of His is immutable. He never repents of it nor withdraws it (Philippians 1:6).*
4. *Whatever comes to pass in time is the result of His will from everlasting (1 Corinthians 8:6), consequently...*
5. *My afflictions were a part of His original plan and are all ordered in number, weight, and measure (Psalm 22:24).*
6. *The very hairs of my head (every one) are counted by Him; nor can a single hair fall to the ground but in consequence of His determination (Luke 12:7). Hence,*
7. *My distresses are not the result of chance, accident, or a fortuitous combination of circumstances (Psalm 56:8), but –*
8. *My distresses are the providential accomplishment of God’s purpose (Romans 8:28), and –*

9. *My distresses are designed to answer some wise and gracious ends (James 5:10-11), and –*
10. *My affliction shall not continue a moment longer than God sees fit (2 Corinthians 7:6-7).*
11. *He who brought me to it has promised to support me under it and to carry me through it (Psalm 34:15-17).*
12. *All shall most assuredly work together for His glory and my good, therefore –*
13. *The cup which my heavenly Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it? (John 18:11)*

Then Zanchius writes, “Yes, I will, in the strength He imparts, even rejoice in tribulation...I will commit myself and the event to Him, whose purpose cannot be overthrown, whose plan cannot be disconcerted, and who, whether I am resigned or not, will still go on to work all things after the counsel of His own will (Romans 5:3-6; Psalm 33:11-12; Ephesians 1:11).”

Zanchius says, “Above all, when the suffering Christian takes his election into account and knows that he was by an eternal and immutable act of God appointed to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ; that, of course, he hath a city prepared for him above, a building of God, a house not made with hands, but eternal in the heaven; and that the heaviest sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in the saints – what adversity can possibly befall us, which the assured hope of blessing like these will not infinitely overbalance (Proverbs 8:35; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Romans 8:18; Romans 8:33-37)?...However keenly afflictions might wound us on their first access, yet under the impression of such animating views we should quickly come to ourselves again; and the arrows of tribulation would in great measure lose their sharpness. Christians lack nothing but absolute resignation to render them perfectly happy in every possible circumstance; and absolute resignation can only flow from an absolute belief of, and an absolute acquiescence in, God’s absolute providence, founded on absolute predestination (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4).”

Without Biblical Predestination:

Why is it important to believe in biblical predestination? This is certainly a biblical doctrine, but it is integral to the biblical teaching on providence. We can never find comfort without this.

Without biblical predestination...

1. ...We have no intellectual means by which we can connect the sovereign power and will of God to life itself; in difficult times, we will be left to random chance and doubt.
2. ...We have no basis for our Christian comfort.
3. ...We have no anchor for our faith.
4. ...We have no assurance of tomorrow.
5. ...We cannot connect our future to God’s promises.

Conclusion:

1 Whate'er my God ordains is right:
his holy will abideth;
I will be still, whate'er he doth,
and follow where he guideth.
He is my God; though dark my road,
he holds me that I shall not fall:
wherefore to him I leave it all.

2 Whate'er my God ordains is right:
he never will deceive me;
he leads me by the proper path;
I know he will not leave me.
I take, content, what he hath sent;
his hand can turn my griefs away,
and patiently I wait his day.

3 Whate'er my God ordains is right:
though now this cup, in drinking,
may bitter seem to my faint heart,
I take it, all unshrinking.
My God is true; each morn anew
sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart,
and pain and sorrow shall depart.

4 Whate'er my God ordains is right:
here shall my stand be taken;
though sorrow, need, or death be mine,
yet am I not forsaken.
My Father's care is round me there;
he holds me that I shall not fall:
and so to him I leave it all.