TITLE: Providence

TEXT: Ro. 9:10-19; Ps. 139: 14-16; Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1: 15-16; 1st Co. 13:12; Ephe. 1: 11-14

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about providence. Providence is a word that we don’t use a lot these days but it is a word that has been used in times past to describe God.

**prov·i·dence** *n.* **1.** Care or preparation in advance; foresight. **2.** Prudent management; economy. **3.** The care, guardianship, and control exercised by a deity; divine direction:**4.** **Providence**. God.

 In the times of the formation of our republic providence was a word that was used as synonymous with God.

Providence being the care, guardianship, and control exercised by a deity; divine direction:

 John Jay, The first chief justice of the United States Supreme Court once made this statement: *“Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty—as well as the privilege and interest –of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”*

“Providence (God) has given to our people the choice of their rulers……

George Mason, the father of our Bill of Rights once said: *“As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities.”*

By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence (God) punishes national sins by national calamities.”

 This brings us to an important truth about providence..

Providence: the care, guardianship, and control exercised by a deity; divine direction:

Providence (God) most of the time, if not always, works His will through what He has created.

Providence is God’s exercising His will through His creation.

 Paul gives us some examples of the providence of God in his letter to the Church in Rome…

**Rom. 9:10-19 (NIV)
10Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: 12not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”**

**14What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15For he says to Moses,**

 **“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,**

 **and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”**

**16It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. 17For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.**

**19One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?”**

Here Paul uses two examples of the providence of God from Hebrew history…

 Gods choosing of Jacob over Esau and Gods hardening Pharaoh’s heart and using him as an instrument of wickedness to reveal His power and Greatness to His people…

 Some will say, “Then why does God still blame us for who can resist His will!”

 First, let’s take the situation with Jacob and Esau…

**11Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: 12not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”**

We can look at this situation on the surface and say where is the justice in this?

**Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad“** God told Rebecca that **The older will serve the younger.” 13Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”**

Where is the fairness in this? How can this be a just and right decision on Gods part? Before these two twins came out of their mother’s womb, before they had done anything good or bad God had already decided their destinies…

 From human perspective it is easy to come up with this conclusion of unfairness on Gods part.

 From human perspective it is understandable how some will look at this situation and say: **Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?”**

This is another area where we have to strive to understand the infinite nature of God. And this is not easy for us to do because we are not infinite. We are finite. And there is always going to be a lot of things that the finite will never be able to fully understand about the infinite.

 God is omnipotent, He is Omniscient, He knows all things before they happen. He sees all of our days before one of them come to be.

**Psa. 139:14 -16 (NIV)
14I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.**

**15 My frame was not hidden from you**

 **when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,**

**16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book**

 **before one of them came to be.**

 God is omniscient. God see’s all of our days before one of them come to be.

 From Gods infinite perspective he sees our entire life at a glance.

 He sees the day that we are conceived in our mother’s womb and He sees the day of our death all in one glance.

 He sees every choice that we will make in our lifetime.

 He sees all the good things that we do and He sees all the bad things that we do all in one glance from His infinite perspective.

 We are finite. We can’t fully grasp the reality of that.

 Our perspective is limited to time and space. We live in the now. Our perspective is limited to what is happening now. We can’t see what will happen tomorrow because of our finiteness, our limited perspective.

 God is infinite and He sees all of our tomorrows…

 So, from His perspective he can see our entire life at a glance.

 When God viewed Jacob and Esau’s life while they were still in their mother’s womb He saw that Jacob would be the one who would live a life of faith and Esau would live a life of rebellion..

 God would not cause either one to live their life the way they would live it, but He saw or foresaw the life that they would live.

 The same thing was true with Pharaoh in Moses day. God didn’t predestine Pharaoh to be used as an instrument of His wrath, but when God looked at Pharaoh’s life from His infinite perspective and saw that Pharaoh would never turn to Him, He used Pharaoh as an instrument of His wrath to reveal His power and Glory and might to those who would make the choice of choosing Him..

**Jer. 1:5 (NIV)
5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,**

 **before you were born I set you apart;**

 **I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”**

**Gal. 1:15 -16 (NIV)
15But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles….**

 How could God appoint Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations while He was yet in His mother’s womb? How could God set apart Paul as an Apostle before he was even born?

 Because from God’s infinite perspective God knew the choices that Jeremiah and Paul would make in their lives that would make their becoming a prophet and an apostle of God possible…

 When Paul was yet in His mother womb God saw that Paul would be a great persecuted of the Church and He saw Paul’s road to Damascus experience with Jesus and Paul’s years of suffering for preaching the Gospel…

 God didn’t cause it all to happen He simply was able to observe what would happen form His infinite perspective…

 God doesn’t create one man for good and another man for evil as some predestinationist believe, but God creates all men equally with a free will, the right to choose for themselves, and He simply uses men according to the choices that He sees that they will make.

 The difference between God and us is that our sight is limited to the here and now and His sight encompasses all eternity…

 God doesn’t cause us to do what we do but He simple sees what we will do from His infinite perspective before we actually do it.

EXAMPLE: I like the Illustration of a Football game…

 We go to a football game and the best seats to us would be ground level at the 50 yard line—maybe sitting right with the players or running the sideline with the coach. From that perspective we are close to the game being played.

 However, from that vantage point our perspective is really pretty limited. If a play is going on and it is a pass play where the quarterback has dropped back with the ball and the tight end is headed for the end zone to catch the pass, we have a choice to make.

 We can either watch the quarterback through the play or watch the tight end through the play but we cannot see both at the same time because of our perspective, where we are sitting on the field will require that we watch one or the other but not both at the same time.

 Now say we have the cheap seats and are sitting in the very top row of the stadium—the nose-bleed section. From there our perspective of the game is totally different.

 From there we can see the quarterback throw the ball and the tight end catch the ball in the same glance because we are so far above the game being played.

 The players may seem smaller to us but we do have a lot better perspective for seeing all the action that is going on the field

 Our perspective on earth is limited by our closeness to the playing field God’s perspective of the playing field of life is entirely different from ours. From where He is sitting he sees it all at a glance

 Providence operates from this infinite prospective.

 And aren’t we glad that it does.

 There is another aspect of providence also…

 I love Paul Harvey’s “The rest of the story” segments..

 One of my favorites is the one about the West Side Baptist Church in Beatrice, Nebraska. Normally all of the good choir people came to church on Wednesday night to practice, and they tended to be early, well before the 7:30 starting time. But one night, March 1, 1950, one by one, two by two, they all had excuses for being late.

 Marilyn, the church pianist overslept on her after-dinner nap, so she and her mother were late. One girl, a high school sophomore, was having trouble with her homework. That delayed her, so she was late. One couple couldn't get their car started. They, and those they were to pick up, were subsequently late. All eighteen choir members, including the pastor and his wife, were late. All had good excuses. At 7:30, the time the choir rehearsal was to begin, not one soul was in the choir loft. This had never happened before.

 But that night, the only night in the history of the church that the choir wasn't starting to practice at 7:30, was the night that there was a gas leak in the basement of the West Side Baptist Church.

 At precisely the time at which the choir would have been singing, the gas leak was ignited by the church furnace and the whole church blew up. The furnace room was right below the choir loft..

 This is another aspect of the Providence of God and example of Divine Providence.

I wonder, how many times does Divine Providence intervene in our lives without our even realizing or recognizing it…

 Shortly after Dallas Theological Seminary was founded in 1924, it almost came to the point of bankruptcy. All the creditors were going to foreclose at noon on a particular day. That morning the seminary staff and board met in the president's office with Dr. Chafer for prayer that God would provide. In that prayer meeting was a man by the name of Harry Ironside.

 When it was his turn to pray, he prayed in his characteristic manner: "Lord, we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are Thine. Please sell some of them and send us the money."

 While they were praying, a tall Texan with boots on and an open collar stepped up to the business office and said, "I just sold two carloads of cattle in Ft. Worth. I've been trying to make a business deal but it fell through, and I feel compelled to give the money to the seminary. I don't know if you need it or not, but here's the check!"

 A little secretary took the check and, knowing how critical things were financially, went to the door of the prayer meeting and timidly tapped. When she finally got a response, Dr. Chafer took the check out of her hand. It was exactly the amount of the debt. When he looked at the name, he recognized the cattleman in Ft. Worth, and turning to Dr. Ironside he said, "Harry, God sold the cattle!"

 When we hear stories such as the ones I just mentioned it seems that there will always be those who will say, what a fortunate coincidence that each of those choir members was late that night!

 What a coincidence that Texas cattleman gave when he did and the amount that he did.

 Boy weren’t they lucky!

 People who are more willing to attribute the miraculous to mere chance then to Divine Providence and Gods love and protection and care for His children…

 I believe all of us experience Divine Providence in our lives on a daily basis-- God operating from His infinite perspective on our behalf.

 Sadly, a lot of the time we fail to recognize it when it happens. Instead we attribute close calls with luck, unexpected blessing as chance…

Example: My Chimney experience

Most all of you here this morning have heard this me share this story before.

 Years ago I went over to my mothers house in St. Charles to tear down the remains of an old plaster covered chimney to prepare a wall because she was going to have someone come and panel the room and I thought it would be better to have that old part of the chimney removed so they would not have to panel around it.

 It was a downstairs room in a 2 story house that I had grown up in and in my recollection never had a chimney come through the roof.

 As I was on a ladder beside this old part of the chimney removing the bricks one at a time and was working on the back row suddenly an 8 foot section of chimney that went up through on upstairs closet came down on my left arm causing a double compound fracture and trapping my arm so I couldn’t get free.

 After what seemed like an eternity the St.Charles rescue finally got my arm free and I was off to the Hospital…

 But what I vividly remember about that day was a

Split second before that chimney fell I had my head under it trying to see what was above me that might come down.

 Was that mere luck, coincidence, chance, or was it Providence?

 I believe it was Divine Providence…What the enemy may very well have meant for destruction God turned to Good…

 Some will say well what about when bad things happen to good people? What about when a child dies before they have had a chance to really experience life? Where is the Divine providence in that?

 This is another area where many times the finite simply cannot understand the infinite.

 When a young child is tragically taken from us through death we have no answers from our finite perspective and many times we will ask, even plead with God, why?

 Many times that answer never seems to come…

 And it is in these times that our only real comfort will come from simply trusting and relying upon the Providence of God.

 Recognizing that He sees things that we cannot see.. He knows things that are impossible for us to know. That even in times of our adversity and trial and tribulation God is still in control and has our ultimate good in mind.

 From Gods infinite perspective He sees the entire life of a person at a glance. From his vantage point He may see things that lie ahead in a child’s life that are so bad that out of His supreme love for them He spares them from going through it. He has so much compassion for them He just takes them home to be with Him at a very early age…

 He may see crippling disease that is yet to be diagnosed.

 He may see violence that that child would never be able to endure.

 He may see something so horrific in that person’s life that it would forever turn that person from Him if they were left to endure it…

 The fact is we don’t know why bad things happen to good people, but we can know that God is a loving and compassionate God and that His compassions never fail and His mercies are made new every morning!

 I, as you, have had times in my life when God has miraculously delivered me from adversity!

 I, as you, have had times in my life when God has allowed me to go through times of trial and tribulation and delivered me with His strength and endurance through that trial and tribulation and I have come out of the trial or tribulation with a stronger faith and trust and reliance in God then when I entered it!

 I, as you, have gone through or watched other people go through things in this life for which I had no answer, things that from my perspective I simply couldn’t understand!

 But God does understand! God knows! God sees! God cares! And God will always do, not what seems best, but He will do what is best!

A man once said;

*What the caterpillar calls the end, God calls a butterfly.*

 There is a coming day when all things will be revealed to us.. There is a coming day when all the mysteries of the universe will be made known to us.. A coming day when all of the questions of life will be answered for us.

Paul has this to say in talking about the day of our complete redemption when we will stand before Christ in His glorious kingdom ….

**1 Cor. 13:12 (NIV)
12Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**

There is a coming day when we will know fully even as we are fully known! A day when we will know and see and understand all things just as Christ knows and sees and understands all things….But that time has not yet come…

So for now we need to just trust in the Providence of God…Trust in His love and compassion and infinite perspective.

**Eph. 1:11 -14 (NIV)
11In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.**

 Are you trusting in the Providence of God this morning?

 Does it encourage you to know that God sees all the days of your life? That He knows all your joys and all your sorrows and He will be with you through all of life’s experiences?

Does it encourage you to know that…**you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession….**

**Prayer**