

The story is told of Martin Luther and his wife, Katie. Luther was in a foul mood. Plans had gone awry and he had been unbearable to live with. So one day Katie came in dressed in black. “*Why are you dressed for mourning, wife?*” he said. “*Haven’t you heard? God has died,*” she answered. Luther exploded, “*God has died? What do you mean by such blasphemous talk? Of course He hasn’t died!*” “*Oh,*” she said. “*I’m sorry. I thought by your manner these last few days that surely He had.*” Her husband got the point. So should we. We can entrust ourselves to God’s care in all things. In all things.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) We can entrust ourselves to God’s care in all things
(magnet) because of the nature of that care.

([READ/PRAY William Cowper’s “God Moves in a Mysterious Way”](#))

the praises. Think of how this must have been so in the course of the storm in Acts 27. Think of the lasting good such a time played in the maturing of even Paul's faith.

B) His Glory

So that's the first of the Lord's great ends He is working all things towards – our good. But the second is this – His glory. In particular, in terms of Acts 28, not just the expansion of faith but the expansion of ministry – God's character and power manifested and displayed that all creation might see yet more of who He is that He would be feared, loved, trusted, served, and obeyed as He should be, as He designed all things to be.

1. Through his writing

We see this expansion in Paul's writing – what are called “the Prison Epistles” (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) – all written during the time of imprisonment spoken of here, none of which would likely have taken the shape that they did in any other setting. Many scholars note that it is in those letters especially we see the supreme, sovereign, undisputed and unrivalled lordship of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

2. Through his personal contact

But we see Paul's ministry expanded not just through his writing but through his contact with others as well. His faith in God on display in the storm before the crew, his captors, and his fellow passengers. The shipwreck on Malta bringing the gospel to a backwater island. And his trial in Rome – he had spoken with Roman governors and a provincial king. Here was an opportunity to witness to Christ before Nero himself. None of which would have happened apart from Paul's great journey to Rome in chains as a prisoner. And through it, God was expanding both Paul's faith and his ministry as well.

Application:

He works all things for our good and His glory. Which means, quite practically, we can say, “*Even 'this' will be for my good. Even 'this' will be for His glory.*”

Listen. We have expectations as to how things are supposed to go. Usually they involve as little trouble and as slight a struggle as possible. Now sometimes things go according to our plan. But sometimes they don't. And when they don't we assume all is lost, the cosmos undone. But whose plan was undone – ours or God's? His course and His schedule will surely at times be different than ours. Ours is not to insist things be changed to fit us but to pray that we be changed to fit Him. And to trust Him, the God of providence – who works in and through all things both for our good and His glory.

CONCLUSION:

Let me ask you this now. What ugliness, what bad, what evil do you see in your life? Perhaps it's a diagnosis you've received or an injury you've suffered. Perhaps it's a struggle of the heart, an idol that keeps taking over your affections. Or you're on the receiving end of a lack of justice, or mercy, or faithfulness in others' dealings with you. A struggle with someone close to you – a separation caused by a deployment. Or the effects of one in the past. Disappointment with your marriage, your family, a friend. An election that didn't go your way. A statistical reality you see sweeping over the culture. A terrorist attack. A tsunami. A war. Name the evil, the pain, the wrong.

Now, let me ask you – can it thwart God's purposes? No! The God of providence, of Acts, works in and through all things – the great and the small, the good and the bad – to surely bring about His great purposes, our good and His glory! Nothing can thwart that. Though we often walk about as though something had or surely will.

2. The bad

But what of the “bad?” The humiliation, insults, and crass injustice. The days, weeks, months, years spent seemingly for no reason in a Roman jail. Nearly drowned at sea and spared an execution only to be bitten by a snake on some remote island – this is hardly a highlight reel. But God assures us in His Word – often through Paul’s very words – that He works even through sin, evil, and suffering; that He is able to move even in things that would seem to contradict His will in such a way as to bring His purposes to pass.

Illustration:

Think of another figure from Old Testament history – Joseph. His brothers, filled with jealousy over their father’s favoritism toward him, sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. This was an evil act. But God was with Joseph in Egypt, raising him to the position of prime minister, overseeing preparations for a famine. When the crops of the region failed, Egypt was well prepared and people of other nations – including Joseph’s family – were then able to survive. Joseph put it this way (**READ Genesis 50:20**).

In this, Joseph’s experience was but a foreshadowing of Jesus’ (**READ Acts 2:22-24**). Clearly God can take the greatest evil imaginable and use it for His holy purposes.

Application:

He is God of all things – ordinary and extraordinary. Nothing too small or too great. Does that not fill your heart with wonder? His are actions for all to see under the bright lights of the stage and in the dark shadows behind the curtains as well.

And other shades of darkness too – the good and the bad. In it all He is working – even in the ugliest He can bring beauty. Now some will say that then makes the ugly beautiful, the horrific thing a praiseworthy thing because of the good that comes from it in the end. And, in a sense, that’s true. But in another sense, we can say it’s still an ugly thing. We can still call it for what it is – wrong, evil. But we have to trust God in it. *“I know You have said You are working in all things – even this. But, Lord, I cannot see how. This is so very wrong. And it hurts. I cannot see any good coming of this. In fact, all I can see is the suffering. Oh, why? Please help me to believe that this – even this – is not beyond your grasp. That You are working even in this. Help me.”* Listen. The fact He is working in all things does not mean we will always be able to see it. We will then need to pray such prayers. They are absolutely right to pray. And He hears. He hears.

II. THE LORD’S GREAT ENDS

For such is the extent of God’s providential care – that the means of His working include everything under the sun. Nothing is excluded. Which takes us to the second thing – that these great means are bringing about even greater ends. Think with me.

What are the two basic ends, the goals, the purposes to which the Lord is working in all these events – great and small, good and evil? His people’s good and His glory.

A) *Our Good*

How do we see the good of His people being worked out here? Beyond the comforts supplied and the healings being worked, we also see the expansion of faith.

1. Cause for praise

In moments of ease, when relief was in sight, a heart of thanksgiving was being worked – praise to the One who had shown such mercy, such grace, such faithfulness.

2. Cause for petition

But as any maturing Christian will tell you, that is not the only way faith is expanded. The times of trial, of hardship, of struggle and difficulty encourage petition and deepen

We don't talk much about this today. I'm afraid we think we've outgrown it. But not those who went before us – the writings of church history are filled with references to this. It's why we read what we did earlier from the Heidelberg Catechism – the patience, the gratitude, the comfort, the rest, the freedom from worry, anxiety, the tyranny of the “what if” – all stems from this, the reality of His all-encompassing, all-inclusive care. In fact, it's no stretch to say that the more we're able to understand God's providential care the more we're able to then entrust ourselves to His care. It's directly proportional.

But having said that, it would be wise to pursue this a little further. What is the nature of this care and how does it then free us to entrust ourselves to Him?

I. THE LORD'S GREAT MEANS

The first thing we have to say is that His care is a present reality in and through all things. All things. Nothing is excluded. There is no “bubble” inside which God is not working all things together for good, for those He has called according to His purpose. Such are His great means. And this comes out so clearly in the events of Acts 28.

A) Through All Things – Ordinary and Extraordinary

1. Ordinary

a) Through nature

Even in ordinary ways – we see favorable winds carrying Paul and the crew of the ship from Malta. After the storm of Acts 27, this would have been all the more appreciated.

b) Through people

As too would the kindness of the islanders (**READ Acts 28:2**). Then this was followed by the hospitality of Publius (**READ Acts 28:7**). Publius' hospitality was then topped only by his people's generosity (**READ Acts 28:10**). Such kindnesses continued as they neared Rome (**READ Acts 28:14-15**). Surely that has a great deal to do with Paul's joy.

2. Extraordinary

But, of course, we see the Lord's care not just in ordinary but extraordinary ways as well.

a) Over nature

Over nature – those winds had not always been so gentle. Yet listen to how Luke records this (**READ Acts 27:44b-28:1**). This is lost in some translations. But clearly they arrived safely on shore only because the Lord of the storm brought them safely to that shore.

Then, of course, there is the incident with the snake and here again the Lord miraculously preserves the life of His servant – much to the amazement of the natives of the island.

b) Over disease

So we see the Lord's hand clearly over nature. And then over disease as well. Publius is obviously a man of influence. But he cannot heal his father (**READ Acts 28:8-9**).

Illustration:

The Lord is God over great and small. Surely we see that here – much as we do in the story of Moses. To protect her infant son, Moses' mother placed him in a floating basket and set him adrift on the river. The currents flowed just right. The basket stayed afloat. No crocodiles took an interest. Myriad tiny factors working together just such that Pharaoh's daughter would find this child. Each one seemingly insignificant yet controlled by God to preserve Moses that he might one day lead His people out of Egypt.

B) Through All Things – Good and Bad

God is God of the great and the small. And the good and the bad as well.

1. The good

In a way, we've already covered some of what we could call the “good.”

May 8, 2005

“The Providence of God”

Acts 28:1-16

FCF: Our failure to appreciate God’s providential ordering

PROPOSITION: (anchor) We can entrust ourselves to God’s care in all things
(magnet) because of the nature of that care.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

In 1931, a taxicab driver in New York City was making his rounds. It was a cold, shadowy night, and as he turned on to Fifth Avenue he saw a figure waiting for him to pass on the almost-deserted street. In a hurry to find one final fare, the driver ignored his instinct to slow and accelerated instead. He hit the rather dumpy man who, perhaps looking in the wrong direction, stepped in his way. The man was Winston Churchill.

Again, the year was 1931 – just a few years before Churchill was to rise to prominence on the world stage as Britain’s Prime Minister and to steel his nation in the fight against Hitler. Yet that night – but for a matter of inches and milliseconds – it nearly never happened. Think of the likely changes to our history. It gives one pause. Now hopefully, that thought will go nothing like this – “*Think of the odds. Western civilization was lucky that night. Fate and Fortune were smiling upon us.*” That would be ridiculous. It would be to attribute such events to forces that do not exist.

Put bluntly, it would be to deny God His due. He would then be a small God with shallow affections and weak devotion towards Him – thin worship. That can’t be right.

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 28:1-16

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

True story – a young father’s best intentions as he took his little ones to see their mom in the hospital on Mother’s Day. She had had complications after the birth of their youngest. But obviously that was no reason for her to spend that day alone. After the visit, he kissed his wife, gathered the children and their gear, and headed for the parking lot. To get the flowers and balloons situated, he had to put the newborn in the carseat on the roof. Then he got the older two buckled and headed home. That’s when it started. People were driving by and making wild gestures. He kept hearing a thumping noise above his head. Then a scraping. And then, out of his mirror – and to his horror – he saw the carseat bouncing off the back of the car and landing in the middle of the highway. Now the drivers behind him had anticipated this so they had kept their distance and formed a barricade once she landed. And to everyone’s relief and joy – she was fine. Not a scratch! The police decided to go easy on the poor dad. Everyone understood his intentions. He’d suffered enough. And most likely, he’d never live this down.

A few lessons. One – fathers can be real bumble heads. Way too easily distracted. Two – this could happen to any of us. And if you don’t believe it then you can forget looking after my children. Three – good intentions aren’t good enough. They don’t go far enough. Our safety, our certainty, our soul’s solace can only be found in the One who holds great intentions with equally great power, great compassion with equally great strength. And that One is the true and living God – the God of providence.

Remember the promise to Paul (**READ Acts 23:11**). Those words make what we read in chapter 28 so stirring (**READ Acts 28:1, 15b-16, 30-31**). The Lord’s promise had held. Paul was in Rome. But it raises a question doesn’t it – why all the difficulties? Why this tortuous path? This takes us to the beauty and wonder of “providence.”