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The Title of today's Sermon is "Providence" Before we turn to the text of today's Sermon, let me first ask: What is "Providence"? Do we understand what it means when God speaks about

providence? Please turn in your Bibles to the Epistle to the Romans, **Rom 8:28**. Most people do not associate the providence of God with the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign, and He rules this universe as a totally Sovereign Potentate. What is the providence of God? Let us begin with the plans of God. Before the foundation of the world, or better yet, an infinite time before the foundation of the world God made up His plans for this creation and for everything He was going to accomplish in history through the motions of His creation. And the end goal of His creation would be  $\epsilon u$ >The Glory of God! $\eta$ Is that not a wonderful end goal? Everything God will have created and will have caused to happen in history will be to the glory of God. Before God started to create He was already infinitely glorious. How everything He created and caused to occur in history might contribute also to His glory is a mystery which we cannot understand. But we should leave this concept up to God, for only God is able to calculate with the concept of infinity, and we cannot. The plans of God are called: The Counsel of God, or The Decree of God. It is as if God took pen and paper and wrote down his plans in a gigantic book. Of course God does not need pen and paper. He can record His entire counsel in His own memory and not forget every detail He planned to do. The Decree of God makes an interesting appearance in the Prophecy of the Revelation of Jesus Christ in the last Epistle of the Bible. In Revelation chapter 5 we see a Scroll that was sealed with seven seals in the hand of Him who sitteth upon the throne. This Scroll is the Decree of God which only the Lamb of God was allowed to open. Then the Lamb opened one seal after another, and history began to unfold exactly the way God intended it to unfold. The hands of God operated by God the Holy Spirit made sure that history began to unfold exactly the way God wanted it to unfold according to the Decree of God. This is called  $\epsilon u$ >The Providence of God.<sup>3</sup>And so, if we can identify the Counsel of God with the plans of God, then we can identify the Providence of God with the hands of God. This is a simplification but it makes it more understandable for our simple minds.

In any sermon concerning the providence of God we should keep in mind **Rom 8:28**. It reads:

**Rom 8:28** And we know that **all things** work together for good to them that love God, to them who are **The** called according to (*his*) purpose.

Do you think now of **Providence**? Actually most of you think of this, as a verse brought up to comfort those who have been hit with some kind of evil, like death in the family, or some other disaster. I am sorry to say,  $\gamma$ ou are then taking this verse out of context.<sup>3</sup>If you look at the context where this verse is found, you will see that the context speaks of an entirely different subject matter.

- The context says: the sufferings in this world are insignificant compared with the future glory, because God is going to prepare something infinitely better than this world.

- The context speaks of US living in the hope of the promised redemption of our bodies on the Last Day, because God will keep US in His care and He will sustain US through trials in this world.

- The context speaks of the Spirit of God making intercession for US in our prayers, because we do not know what we should pray for as we ought; God intercedes for US His will be done.

- The context speaks of God's plan of Election and the glorification of His Saints, and He continues to talk about this subject all the way to the end of Romans Chapter 11.

In other words, the context speaks of the actions of God in this world, the actions of God in salvation, the actions of God in our lives, and the actions of God in the life hereafter.

It is all about the actions of God near the end of time                      It is all about: Providence !

What is Providence?                      Providence is the Universal Sovereign Rule of God. (2X)

Therefore, when we read Rom 8:28 we must understand it in the context of God's Providence:

**Rom 8:28** And we know that **all things** work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to (*his*) purpose.

The Greek word for 'all things' does not always mean 'all things' but here in this Verse, because of the context where we find it, it does mean literally 'ALL THINGS' When God says here in Rom 8:28 that 'ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER' God is saying that: The Universal Sovereign Rule of God is upon everything that occurs on this earth, for the sole purpose of benefitting only those whom God calls unto salvation, according to His purpose. For example, look now a little further to **Rom 8:32**

**Rom 8:32** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us **all things**?

Here again 'ALL THINGS' refers to **all things** here on earth as well as all things in Heaven.

**Therefore, we can say that The Providence of God is the outworking of the Divine Blueprint which God decreed before He created this universe. He made it. He is working it out. Nothing occurs without His foreknowledge! Or in the words of Eph 1:11, it is the outworking of His purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will** Now in the passage that I have selected for today's sermon we see an example of the Providence of God. Let us turn there now.    I Kings 17:1-7

- **Historical Review**

You remember that Ahab was the king of the Northern kingdom of Israel and Ahab had married Jezebel, who was the daughter of the king of Sidon, a heathen king. Ahab was not allowed to do that; God had said that they may not intermarry with the heathen of the land,

because then they would begin to worship the gods of their wives, they would begin to worship the idols of the Canaanites. And what God had said, certainly came to pass. Both Ahab and Jezebel were very wicked, and they worshipped idols instead of Jehovah God. They worshipped Baal and Asherah, and almost the whole kingdom of Israel followed after them. Like the king goes, so goes the nation; and that is a rule which applies in those days as well as in our days. You can see it all around you. Look at the surprising elections we have had in the recent past, and you can see that the evil of our rulers is being imitated by the people they rule over. Was this not surprising?

In the kingdom of Israel there lived a man by the name of Elijah the Tishbite, who had a holy zeal for Jehovah God. Elijah cried to God that God would chasten Israel so that they would return to Jehovah God. We read in James 5:17 that Elijah prayed fervently, and God granted him his request. God answered the earnest cry of Elijah and God chose him to be the instrument in God's hand, to turn this nation back to the worship of Jehovah God. To begin with God sent him to king Ahab. We read about that here in Chapter 17:1,

1Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was of the sojourners of Gilead*, said unto Ahab, **As Jehovah God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.** What a BOLD man was this Elijah.

Elijah spoke as if the power of God and the resources of Heaven were at his disposal. He spoke as if the keys of Heaven had been given to him. Now, there is a lot of truth to that!

When the Lord Jesus Christ sends US to the heathen, He never sends US to warfare on our own power. In fact, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven have indeed been given to US. You remember the sermon on the Keyes: it is the preaching of the Gospel.

Elijah went to Samaria and he rebuked king Ahab. The king could have killed Elijah for speaking in such a threatening way. But Elijah did not fear the king: God was on the side of Elijah.

- And now we can see the Providence of God in action: We read in Chapter 17:2

1Ki 17:2 And the word of Jehovah came unto him, saying,

1Ki 17:3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan.

Now, this verse clearly explains where the brook Cherith is located: Elijah came from Gilead, which was East of the Jordan river. Elijah traveled West to Samaria, the capital city of Israel where he had to deliver the message to Ahab. Now God said to him: Turn back, go Eastward and hide by the brook named Cherith which is before Jordan

So, where is the brook Cherith located? It is before you come to Jordan. It is West of Jordan.

What is the Jordan river typifying? Hell! Elijah, you don't have to cross Jordan again. You did it once, that is enough. God does not require double dipping. Let us now read verse 4:

**1Ki 17:4** And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

- **O No ! O No ! not the ravens !** The ravens are unclean birds. They are unclean like pigs.

- Lord, You told US through Moses that the ravens are an abomination.
- The ravens are as bad as the heathen dogs out there.
- Lord, remember that Jezebel is one of those heathen dogs from the kingdom of Sidon.

But God said: The ravens God has made the ravens to become His servants, to feed Elijah. Can you see what God is doing? God is letting us know that He has a job for the ravens. Let us understand the spiritual meaning of this: The unsaved in the world are still God's servants, for God has put them in the world to be of service to His elect people. They are feeding us; they are giving us jobs; they are giving us money so that we have food and raiment and food. The ravens are feeding us and they are bringing us bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening. Can you see the providence of God in action also today?

What Elijah did not know, was that God was preparing Elijah for the next phase in these 3 ½ years that Elijah had to hide himself. God was going to have Elijah sustained by one of those heathen dogs from the kingdom of Sidon. God was training Elijah to see the providence of God. But in this passage of Verses 2 through 7 Elijah is commanded by God to hide himself by the brook Cherith.

**1Ki 17:5** So he went and did according unto the word of Jehovah: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan.

**1Ki 17:6** And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

**1Ki 17:7** And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

Can you see the situation that is developing here? The entire kingdom of Israel is drying up. Nothing grows because there is no water, not even a little dew in the morning, the food supply is disappearing. Very soon thousands of people are going to die because they have nothing to eat.

But God is on the side of Elijah. God is arranging Heaven and earth so that all the needs of Elijah are being filled. Elijah does not lack anything. That is Providence! God is taking care of His servant.

Now can you also see **Rom 8:28** in action?

**Rom 8:28** And we know that **all things** work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to (*his*) purpose.

Did God miraculously change the character of the ravens to fulfill His purposes? Of course He did! The entire scenario is miraculous; it is one miracle after another. God says in **Phil 4:19**

**Phil 4:19** But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. All our needs are being filled out of the riches of the world, which means it comes out of the treasures of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you could add many other verses to this, because this is a Biblical principle: God arranges the course of world history so that everything works together for the benefit of His Saints.

That is Providence! But the benefit is only for His Saints, not for all those whom God has passed by

The Bible does not say that God loves everybody in the world. He loves only those that are His

- **How Did Elijah Become Such a favorite?**

Was he always such a Saint? Did he have such a perfect childhood? No! Not at all!

God states clearly: There is NONE righteous, NO NOT ONE! They are all headed for Hell!

How did Elijah become a Saint? Well, You should have asked, How did Elijah become saved? How did anyone in the O.T. become saved? And the answer is: The same way anyone in the New Testament becomes saved.

When the Lord Jesus Christ said: No man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6) did He really mean **No onex** That is precisely what He meant: **NO NOT ONE!** When God the Son came to earth, He came to save His People from their sins. (Matt 1:21)

But who are His people? His people are all those He came to save, from the O.T. time as well as from the N.T. time. All His elect are His people.

- His People are **not** the Jews. But if you or I do not belong to His People, we would be in real trouble.

- Abel and Enoch and Noah all lived long before Abraham, and they also belong to His People.

- How were they saved? They were saved by Grace just like we are!

- The Lord Jesus Christ had to pay for the sins of Elijah as well as for our sins.

- The Lord Jesus Christ had to be a Substitute for Elijah as well as for US!

When the Bible speaks of Christ as our Substitute, paying for our sins as our Substitute, do you realize that His substitutionary Atonement for our sins was infallible? His Atonement was absolutely

infallible, it could not fail. And therefore, His Atonement was not for everybody in the whole world. If He had Atoned for everybody in the whole world, then nobody would go to Hell!

When the Lord Jesus said in **Matt 7:13-14**

**Mat 7:13** Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and **many** there be (2X) which go in thereat:

**Mat 7:14** Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few** there be that find it.

Christ was not a Substitute for the **many**. What a pitiful Savior He would have been if He had to endure the Wrath of God for the sins of the **many**, but the many would still end up in Hell.

The Lord Jesus is saying in **Matt 7:13-14** that **many** end up in Hell, and **few** end up in Heaven. These few are the ones for whom the Lord Jesus Christ was a Substitute. As our Substitute He endured the wrath of God for the guilt of all our sins. He endured the pains of Hell in our place, and that is how all our sins are removed from God's sight as far as the East is from the West.

- Now, if we claim to be among these few, for whom the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, then

### **How Great Is Our Gratitude?**

That is not an idle question. Many people think that if they go to Church for one hour a week, and perhaps drop a dollar in the offering plate, that this should be sufficient to show to God their gratitude for what Christ offered for them, and that God would be sufficiently pleased with such a sacrifice. Did the Lord Jesus not say in **Mark 7:6**

**Mark 7:6** Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me.

In other words: Many people are going through the motions, but their heart is not with the Lord Jesus. They have lost their first love for Christ. They serve Him on Sundays by their money on the offering plate, but that is where their love stops. Did the Lord Jesus not say in **Matt 24:12** that The love of many shall wax cold. The prophet Jeremiah gave us the example how we must have a true love for Christ. We read in **Jer 15:16**,

**Jer 15:16** Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.

In other words, the Word of God must become so much our spiritual food that we become one with this Word of God, and it becomes our all-consuming desire to know and understand it. And then it becomes the joy and rejoicing of our heart. If we are truly called by His name, if we are truly among the elect of God, then this will be our utmost desire, and this will be our greatest joy. Can we say that of ourselves? How great is our Gratitude? We can take Elijah as our example! He gave his all! He

risked his life. We read that beginning at **I Kings 17:1** he dedicated his entire life to the service of Jehovah.

- Is that what God expects of US? To dedicate our whole life to Him?
- Is that the response of those for whom the Lord Jesus Christ gave his life?
- Is that the response of those for whom the Lord Jesus Christ suffered the torments of Hell?
- Is that the response of those to whom God has given all things?

That is indeed the gratitude that God expects from US. No, not only does He expect that from US. But through the mighty work that God the Holy Spirit works in US **that is indeed** our response. I am not saying this to put you on the spot or to put you down, but this is what the Bible teaches. The Bible says: This is what a true Disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is like. Let us read that in **Rom 12:1**

**Rom 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*

Take Elijah as our example! But now we run into another problem:

- **Elijah was in hiding.**

And not only was he hiding, but it was a command of God.

Now, we know that a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is not hiding himself, but comes forth as a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. A Witness is one who proclaims the Gospel to the world. The Greek word for Witness is the same that stands for Martyr. A Witness must be willing to be a Martyr for the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we have here a contradiction in the Word of God? Perish the thought.

There are **two different concepts of hiding** in the Bible. One is: hiding away for fear of men. That is NOT what a man of God must do. That is NOT how we should interpret the hiding of Elijah. Rather, God is painting a spiritual picture here of the second type of hiding that is used in the Bible: Hiding spiritually in Christ, or resting in the finished work of Christ.

- Remember that Elijah was hiding at the God appointed place of rest.
- In the same manner sinners flee for refuge to that appointed place called "alvary"

**How do I know** that this act of hiding by Elijah should be interpreted spiritually? We know because the same Hebrew word for hide is used in the Psalms, where God says:

**Ps 27:5** For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide <05641> me; he shall set me up upon a rock. **(2X)**

To hide me in His pavilion and to set me upon a Rock seem to be contradictory statements, unless this verse is to be interpreted spiritually. But this is exactly what happened to Elijah. Elijah was physically resting by the brook Cherith, so that we see the picture of resting in Christ.

**Ps 32:7** Thou *art* my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.



**Ps 91:1** He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Furthermore, God says in **Col 3:3**

**Col 3:3** For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. **(2X)**

God says: you are dead to the Law and now your life is safe and securely **hidden** with Christ in God. You don't have to fear the sting of the Law; it cannot hurt you. You are now UNITED with Christ. You are now ONE with Christ. This is how your life is hid with Christ in God. This is the hiding that Elijah did by the brook Cherith. But look now at another aspect of the hiding of Elijah.

The brook that was to give him the water of life has a name that is associated with DEATH. The name Cherith means: a cutting off, a killing. How can this be? It is because the water of life, meaning the true Gospel, always includes the DEATH of Christ. The true Gospel always speaks of the Atoning Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **Then the Brook Dried Up !**

How can this fact be reconciled with the idea that the brook represents the water of the Gospel?

**1Kings 17:7** And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

The Hebrew words that have been translated 'after a while' literally have the meaning 'at the end of days'. Let us look at the significance of the term 'at the end of days'.

For example the same two Hebrew words are used in **Dan 12:13** where God says to Daniel:

**Dan 12:13** But go thou thy way till the end *be*: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days. (Which means: at the end of time.)

God says in **1Kings 17:7** that the end of time will come after a period that there has been no rain; which means: no water, no preaching of the true Gospel.

God says in the N.T. clearly that the end of time will come after a period that the true water of the Gospel has been cut off. But God, through His Providence, kept providing for the needs of Elijah until the end of days!

Is that not of great comfort for US who are living near the end of time. Even when the true Gospel is dried up in the land, God will still provide for all the needs of all His Children until the end of days.

**Psalms 46:1** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

This is a promise that keeps us going. Like Elijah, we can trust that God will supply all our needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Christ will not abandon US. Christ is still in charge of everything in Heaven and on this earth.

Everything in world history is arranged by God for the benefit of His Saints.

That is called **Providence!**

AMEN.            Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.