LD 10; Matthew 10:26-31; Rom. 5:1-5; The Providential Work of our Loving Father I. The Content of Providence II. The Comfort of Providence

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is the worst thing that has ever happened in your life? The most difficult and trying time that you have gone through? Now, I want you to think of the best thing that has ever happened- what is the most enjoyable event that you have ever experienced? What do those two events have in common? The answer is this- God was the architect of both! This truth may be hard to take- but as we have seen in Job- shall we accept good and not evil from the LORD’S hand? It is He that both gives and takes away! Or as we learn in Amos 3, shall there be evil in the city and the LORD has not done it. In fact, if God is really the sovereign and omnipotent One, is it possible to conceive of an event that happens outside of His control? No, as we will see today, everything happens as a part of God’s sovereign and good purpose. When it comes to prophecy and fulfillment, could God foretell future events if He did not control everything to ensure that those events came to be? As we continue to consider God the Father and our creation, today we focus on the providential work of our loving Father. And this point is important, the God who ordains and controls everything is not some distance, uncaring or unknown God. No, the providential work of God is the work of a loving Father who cares for us. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals the providential work of the Father for the comfort of His people.

**I. The Content of Providence**

In our first point we consider the extent of our God’s providential work. What does God’s providence cover? Is there a territory beyond His control? Is there a stray atom beyond His gaze? The simple answer is no- nothing is outside His view and control. The providential work of God covers all things. QA 27- Providence is the almighty, ever present power of God by which He upholds all things. Our God who created everything continues to sustain and rule over everything that He has made. The term, providence, simply speaks to the way in which God sustains. Note- His power is ever present and covers all things! So our God continues to work- even to this day. Although our God rested on the 7th day from His creative work, He continues His preserving work even now. As Jesus confessed in John 5, the Father works until now. Our God is the alpha- the beginning and source of everything. He is also the omega- the end- bringing everything to its designed telos and to His ordained end. But even the middle- not just the beginning and the end- but the middle- the “in between” is also where God is and where He is working! Without His hands holding everything together, everything would fall down like a house of cards at the slightest gust of air. So lets get into the details- what does God’s providence cover? The extent is this- everything in heaven and earth. Nothing is outside- no object to great or small. The largest star is named and set in its place by His hand. The smallest atom moves at His design. All creatures- from the greatest to the least of these. The mighty behemoth and leviathan that Job writes about- to the birds of the air and the ant in its hill. Jesus proves as much in our reading from Matthew 10:29 where we find the smallest sparrow sold for a penny- and yet not one of these will fall to the ground apart from your Father’s will. Even the hairs of your head are numbered and known. Even the angels and devils must go where He sends. Every leaf and blade- every man, woman and child. All find their place in the hands of our Creator. But this almighty power of God covers not only everything that is; it also covers all that happens. God’s providential work is everywhere present and ever present. Covering all things- and covering all time. God’s power does not take a day off- no time slips by when His power is not at hand. This means that good times and ill are all part of His work. As we have been seeing in the life of Job- both good and ill are from the LORD. Nothing can happen that He does not first ordain. Or as QA 28 puts it, no creature can move or be moved without His will. So God’s providence covers all time and all events. Fruitful and lean; rain and drought; health and sickness; prosperity and poverty. All are His work and part of His domain. Now this takes faith- it takes faith to see God’s hand behind everything. But we, like Job and Joseph, must come to see everything as coming to us from Him. So when you are young, able, strong and healthy- and when you are old, disabled, weak and sick- God is still God and He is still in control! When your investments prosper and your wealth increases- or when you have poor return and loss of principle- even then God is the almighty, ever-present God! This truth keeps us grounded- it helps us avoid bitterness when going through trying times and it helps us avoid pride when times are well. As we find in Jeremiah 9, let not the rich man boast in his riches or the wise man boast in his wisdom, or the mighty man boast in his might. But let him who boasts, boast in this- that He understands and knows the LORD who practices love, justice and righteousness in the earth.

Before we move on to our second point, there are few errors that have to be exposed. Believing in the providential power of God means that we are simply acknowledging God and His work. Providence is not an independent power like some rule or law that runs all by itself. Things like destiny or fate- something being written in the stars. No, providence is the power of God’s hand- describing His work. This also means that God did not leave everything up to change or fate. As BC art. 13 puts it, God did not give things over to fortune or change- He does not abandon the works of His hands. So nothing is really random in this world- nor does anything happen by change or dumb luck. And finally the providence of God proves that everything is under His control- and moves at His pleasure. There is no power or ruler or principality that is a free agent- left to run amuck on its own. No devil or fallen angel or ruler of men is able to act apart from His will and decree. In fact, the heart of the king is like water in our God’s hand as Prov. 21 puts it- God is able to turn it and move it in any way that He sees fit. So this is the content of the providential work of God.

**II. The Comfort of Providence**

Moving on, we continue by applying this doctrine to our hearts and lives. Since it is true that God know the future, controls all events and ordains all that has and will be; how should we now live? Or what is the benefit of knowing the truth about the providential work of our heavenly Father? This is the very question that QA 28 asks- how does the knowledge of God’s creation and providence help us? Well, starting off we can be patient in adversity. Patient when times are difficult and hard. Like Job, we can worship in the storm. Like Joseph- praising God in the pit and dungeon. Or Jonah- praying to God in the belly of the fish. Patience is the ability to wait with a quiet heart. For God’s people, we can patiently endure because we know that there is a purpose and meaning behind everything that happens. Our reading from Rom. 5 points to the fruit of this patient endurance. Adversity, trials, tribulation and hardships are the God ordained tools of our sanctification. These sufferings produces endurance, character and hope. To say this another way, endurance is the fruit of adversity. Children, if someone wants to get stronger, why do they lift weights? Why not just lift empty water bottles? Well, as you know, weight is what forces the body to produce muscle. The added resistance breaks down the current state so that stronger bonds can be made. In a similar way, God uses trials to strengthen our faith. To produce the fruit of patience and endurance. If life was easy all the time, we might forget to look forward and we would no longer hope for the things to come. So when it is God’s will that we walk though a time of trial, we can trust that God has His own purpose for it. There will be a good end- a proper resolution if not in this world then in the world to come. Like farmers, we have to wait for the good fruit to be formed in us. So we learn to be patient in adversity. Second, we are to be thankful when times are well. Praise God, our lives are not just filled with adversity there are also times of joy. Times of blessings, happiness and peace. When God gives us these gifts, the proper response is that of thanksgiving! Gratitude when times are good. Or a I Thes. 5:18 puts it, rejoice always. Give thanks in all circumstances. When we come to learn that everything comes from God- that He is the fountain and source of every good and perfect gift- we will start to see the hand clearly that gives us each good blessing. Or stated in a question, how can we be thankful if we do not know the source of every gift? You see, every blessing is not just cast into the sky to fall indiscriminately. We are not all playing the slot machine where some hit the jackpot and others do not. No, each gift is given specifically to the person it was designed for. That, by the way, is why stealing from others is such a heinous sin. It is taking for yourself what God has given to someone else. And finally, as QA 28 concludes, we can have a good confidence in our faithful God and Father. Now what does it mean to have confidence in the future? Well, confidence in the future is rooted in two things. First, confidence in the future means that you have certain hope that things will work out. We know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him as we have memorized from Rom. 8. So, a confidence in the future means that you are certain- you know that God will eventually work it for your good. The second ground for our confidence is found later on in Rom. 8- where we know that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Nothing can take us from the hands of our Good Shepherd. Nothing can remove God from us or us from God! This confidence in a final victory and reunion with our God is what gives us confidence for the future! This is the hope that does not put us to shame as our text from Rom. 5 put it. The confidence that our God will not disappoint us- that our trust in Him will not be misplaced. We can have the confidence and comfort in this fact- our God sees us, cares for us, and will take care of us. This is the application Jesus gives in our reading from Matthew 10. If the grass is clothed by God and the sparrow find a home because of His care; how much more won’t He care for us?! Fear not, Jesus says, are you not of more value than many sparrows?! Jesus reveals this truth to comfort his disciples! The doctrine of God’s providence is designed to take away our fears! Fear not- do not doubt- only believe! The truth of this teaching moves us from a place of worry and doubt to a place of peace and rest! God sees, He knows, He cares and He will protect and provide! You are His children, He is your loving, heavenly Father! We have a lasting hope because we are apple of His eye- His banner of love is over us! This doctrine is incredibly applicable. Where do you find yourself today? Good times- then seeing God’s hand will move you to thanksgiving. Hard times- then knowing God is still at work will move you to patience. What about the common, day-to-day waiting? The hum drum of normal life- day in and day out. Here too God’s providence reminds us to look to Him in confidence. To wait on the Lord as Psalm 27 concludes. Waiting for God’s plan to work itself out in His good time! So this truth covers all of life- constantly reminding us to look above and see your Heavenly Father at work.

To conclude, imagine for a moment that we did not know if God was in control. Imagine the untold number of things that could go wrong. People that we were supposed to meet passed- opportunities missed- dangers unseen- enemies let loose to do their worse to us. Without the providence of God we would be rightly subject to all worry, fear, anxiety and dread! But because we know that our loving Father created and sustains all- that He upholds and ordains everything that is. This truth gives us confidence and comfort! Jesus Christ reveals the providential work of the Father for the comfort of His people. John Calvin put it like this: “Ignorance of providence is the greatest of all miseries, and the knowledge of it the highest happiness.” So may God’s people rejoice in God the Father and His providential care!