

Believing and Seeing the Providence of God

Many of the presentations at our annual conference gathering focused on the providence of God. If one listened, there were various definitions and illustrations offered. The life of Joseph is, of course, a familiar and favorite story to teach God's providence—"you intended it for evil, but God meant it for good." Vignettes from Joseph's life given periodically through the weekend reminded us of lessons from his life. The obvious reality is that at times Joseph could see God's providence, while at other times he could only believe and hope for such goodness.

In times of shadow and darkness, we may struggle to believe in the absence of sight. At other times God's providence seems to shine with unmistakable clarity. I had one of those moments recently.

My wife Lynette and I were travelling east toward home in northern Indiana at the same time that our daughter



Conrad Showalter

ter Bethany was travelling west toward her home in Chicago. We had communicated earlier in the day and assumed that Bethany would arrive home a couple hours before we passed by on the south side of Chicago. As we approached Chicago, it was getting dark

and Lynette sent a text message to Bethany to see if she was home. A call came back immediately; Bethany had just pulled off busy I-94 in Chicago with a flat tire. Somehow, the spare had been taken out of her car and not replaced.

If you are a father you can relate to my feelings of concern for my daughter's safety. If you are a woman, you will probably identify with Bethany's sense of vulnerability in that situation. Could I not see God's providence in the reality that Bethany was sitting just ten miles off my intended path? I was a dad all too happy to make a slight detour, share the spare from our car (we just "happened"

to also be driving a Civic), change the tire (my spare was under-inflated, but it got us to a nearby service station), follow Bethany home, and finally arrive home with Lynette a couple hours later than planned, yet so thankful for God's timing. The earlier two-hour difference had been adjusted by heavy traffic on Bethany's route, and for once, the ever-present road work in Chicago provided a relatively safe place outside the barrels for changing the tire.

Such times of seeing are wonderful, indeed. Yet I long for the kind of trust in God's goodness that carries me through dark times with quiet confidence, if not exultant joy. I choose to believe Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (NIV) and verse 39, "nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (NLT) May God give us all grace for believing and for seeing, especially for believing!

MODERATOR'S DESK

Blurred Vision

Millions of people worldwide have vision problems. Over half of all Americans over age thirty wear glasses or other visual aids. Many vision problems exist—nearsightedness, farsightedness, blurred vision, tunnel vision, cataracts, glaucoma, etc. Recently I had an eye exam which showed that my close vision wasn't as clear as it once was. I could have told them that without the exam! It had been 8 years since I last changed my prescription. New glasses have brought my close vision back into sharp focus.

But an even more serious problem exists for some people, a lack of spiritual insight and vision. Abraham's nephew Lot had what I call blurred vision. "Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD" (Genesis 13:10a). Lot saw the beautiful crops but didn't see

the potential consequences beyond his immediate choice.

Abraham's and Lot's herds had grown to the point that they were crowding each other and their herdsmen began to squabble. Abraham wisely chose to end the conflict by suggesting they go their separate ways and he graciously gave Lot the first pick of the land. Lot, with his blurred vision, saw only the choice crops of the Jordan Valley and failed to see the evil influences of the Sodomites who lived nearby.

There are times that we too can have blurred vision similar to Lot's. It is then that we need the help of God's Spirit to discern his will and to see the long-term effects of the decisions we are considering. We need to look carefully not only at the immediate results but also at the long-term results of our choices. Every decision we make in life should be made

by considering God and the impact it will have on our personal spiritual growth and on our loved ones.

We check our physical eyesight periodically so vision problems can be corrected. Failure to have your eyes checked could lead to a serious loss of vision. In the same way, if we neglect to check our spiritual value system, blurred spiritual vision can result. May God grant us spiritual vision to see clearly with eyes focused on the Lord and on his values. "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).



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