

Providence (1)

Turning this evening to the subject of Providence we are approaching this lecture with the help of the subject index to Spurgeon's sermons, to see how this subject featured in the ministry of the "Prince of Preachers". The idea is to look at this topic from a practical point of view showing what aspects of the subject can be included in a regular preaching ministry.

I. There is a wise overruling Providence

Now obviously an important part of our ministry on this subject will be to teach our people to think in terms of the fact that a wise Providence rules over all things.

There is nothing of which it is more difficult to convince men than that the Providence of God governs the world.

Calvin on Jeremiah chapter 5

Spurgeon took the opportunity to preach on this fact of a wise overruling Providence when his congregation, himself included was stunned by the very sudden death of one of its members, Mr Henry Olney. A man in the prime of life, apparently strong and healthy, who went to work in the city in the morning, returned home at lunchtime, and later that same-day died, Spurgeon preaching the next day, Sunday morning, giving a marvellous description of the Providence of God.

(Note, Spurgeon counselled from the pulpit, and used this great doctrine to strengthen and console his congregation).

First, then let us consider a truth which I trust, none of us have ever denied, but have heartily accepted ever since we have been believers. THERE IS A DIVINE PROVIDENCE RULING ALL HUMAN LIFE. Not that I single out man's existence as the sole object of divine forethought, far rather do I believe it to be but one little corner of illimitable Providence. A divine appointment arranges every event, minute or magnificent. As we look out on the world from our quiet room it appears to be a mass of confusion. He who studies history and forgets God might think that he was looking out on chaos and cold night, for events seem flung together in terrible disarray, and the whole scene is as darkness itself, without any order. Events happen which we deeply deplore -- incidents which appeared to bring evil, and only evil, and we wonder why they are permitted. The picture before us, to the glance of reason, looks like a medley of colour, with dark shades where lights seemed needful and glowing colour where we might have looked for masses of black. Human affairs are a maze of which we cannot discover the clue. The world appears to be a tangled skein, and we weary ourselves with vain endeavours to disentangle it.

But, brethren, the affairs of this world are neither tangled, nor confused, nor perplexing to him who seeth the end from the beginning. To him all things are in due course and order, and before him all forces keep rank and file. God is in all, and rules all. In the least as well as in the greatest, Jehovah's power is manifested. He guides the grain of dust in the March wind, and the comet in its immeasurable pathway; he steers each drop of spray which is beaten back from the face of the rock, and he leads forth Arcturus (The Great Bear and the Little Bear constellations) with his sons. God is the dictator of destinies, and appoints both meanness and ends. He is the King of king's, ruling rulers and

guiding councillors. Alike in the crash of battle and in the hush of peace, in the desolation of pestilence and famine, and in the joy of abounding harvests he is Lord. He doeth according to his will, not only in the army of heaven, but among the inhabitants of the lower world. Yon fiery steeds, which dash so terribly along the highway of time, are not careering madly: there is a charioteer whose almighty hands have held the reins for ages, and will never let them go. Things are not in the hurly-burly which we imagine, but driven onward by a power which is irresistible, they are under law to God, and speed onward without deviation towards the goal which he designs.

All is well, brethren! It is night, but the watchman never sleepeth, and Israel may rest in peace. The tempest rages, but it is well, for our Captain is governor of storms. He who trod the waves of the Galilean lake is at the helm, and at whose bidding winds and waves are quiet.

It is vitally important that we restore to the everyday thinking of Christian people a concept of the overruling Providence of God. It was certainly the belief of believers of previous generations that the universe owed its existence and its continuance to the will and oversight of the All - wise, All - powerful, All - loving, All - just Creator, whose goodness is over all his works.

We need to teach our people again that a kind and wise purpose runs through all the apparent confusion of events. A purpose that is moral and good in its essential character.

It cannot be denied that there are many perplexing tragedies in life, many dark and insoluble problems in the history of individual men and nations. Faith however is assured that they are but problems of our vision, and that if our eyes could only see through the thick clouds of ignorance we would bow the knee and worship, at the breathtaking glory of the all - embracing plan, and the perfect wisdom and love of God who's "*Word cannot return unto him void.*"

The Bible teaches us that God's Providential Control is over all Events

The Bible clearly teaches God's providential control over all things.

1. *Over the universe at large, Psalm 103:19; Dan 5:35, Eph 1:11.*
2. *Over the physical world, Job 37:5,10; Psalm 104:14; 135:6; Matthew 5:45.*
3. *Over the brute creation, Psalm 104:21, 28; Matthew 6:26; 10:29.*
4. *Over the affairs of nations, Job 12:23; Psalm 22:28; 66:7; Acts 17:26.*
5. *Over man's birth and lot in life, 1 Sam. 16: 1; Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 45:5; Galatians 1:15, the 16.*
6. *Over the outward successes and failures of men's lives, Psalm 75:6,7; Luke 1:52.*
7. *Over things seemingly accidental or insignificant, Proverbs 16:33; Matthew 10:30.*
8. *In the protection of the righteous, Psalm 4:8; 5:12; 63:8; 121:3; Romans 8:28.*

9. In supplying the wants of God's people. Genesis 22:8, 14; Deuteronomy 8:3; Philipians 4:19.

10. In giving answers to prayer, 1 Sam. 1:19; Isaiah 20:5, 6; II Chronicles 33:13; Psalm 65:2; Matthew 7:7; Luke 18:7, 8.

11. In the exposure of punishment of the wicked, Psalm 7:12, 13; 11:6.

Berkof's Systematic Theology p. 168

There are many reasons why our modern world has lost all concept of an overruling Providence

a. If we had time we could trace out the influences of 18th-century pessimism. The philosophers emptied the world of spiritual significance, depreciated the value of life, and denied that it had any meaningful purpose.

b. Darwinianism i.e. the idea that hundreds of thousands of millions of years ago, God or some accident, caused a living cell to come into existence, and that since that time God has had no more to do with the universe; that as far as practical involvement is concerned he might as well not exist.

c. The Agnosticism of men such as T H Huxley who in the 19th Century sowed seeds of positive hostility towards the doctrine of Providence.

Divine providence is an excuse for the poor whom we will always have with us; for the human improvidence which produces whole broods of children without reflection or care as to how they shall live; for not taking action when we are lazy; or, more rarely, for justifying the actions we do take when we are energetic. From the point of view of the future destiny of man, the present is a time of clash between the idea of providentialism and the idea of human control by human effort in accordance with human ideals. If providentialism wins, even wins only in the domain of the soul and the religious life, humanity is doomed to stagnation, or to destruction.

The Riddle of the World D.S. Cairns Baird Lecture 1932 p. 161

Cairn's answer to this affirmation of Huxley's is worth recording;

The whole passages is so remote from reality and so glaringly discordant with the facts of human life that ones interest tends for the moment to pass from the accusation to the accuser. How did he come to believe it? He must surely have been very unfortunate for one thing in the Christians he has known whose energy of faith in God's Providence dulled their practical energies and their love for their kind. And I fear that it is only too obvious that in the wide range of his culture he had read very little Christian biography and has a blind eye for Christian history. It takes some hardihood for anyone, in English-speaking lands, to maintain that faith in God's providence deadens the beneficent energies of love. One thinks, to limit one survey to our own fellow countryman, of such as Lord Shaftesbury, Florence Nightingale, General Booth, Livingston, General Gordon and a whole host of less conspicuous men and women who have shown amazing persistence of courage and self-sacrifice in the war with poverty, slavery and vice of every kind, and whose biographies disclose unmistakably that

their faith in God, instead of dulling their noble energies, created and sustained them.

Ibid p 162

Let the great Calvin Memorial in Geneva also bear witness, the idea of that colossal monument is that out of the faith of Calvin were born all the free governments of the modern world. Right and left of the austere figure of the Reformer of Geneva are William the Silent of Holland, Coligny of France, John Knox of Scotland, a Pilgrim Father of New England, and Oliver Cromwell -- Calvinists all. When we think of such men we do not think of pietistic acquiescence, or of their faith as "an opiate of the people," we think of firm endurance on the very edge of despair against overwhelming odds, and of volcanic activity for the city of God.

So far as Calvinism from producing slackness of will the feebleness of character Calvinists have been the most strenuous of men." The true Calvinist feels himself to be an instrument of the Divine Will and bends to whatever toil he undertakes in the unshakable conviction that he is on the side of God. How copious a spring of moral energy lies in this thought I need not tell you..... Calvinism was the form of faith in the strength of which the Dutch Republic was sustained, and the American Republic founded, to propagate which Tyndale gave the English people the Bible in their own tongue and with it his life; which formed the royal intellect of Cromwell and inspired the majestic verse of Milton. Shall I say more, or is not this enough?

p. 169

Spurgeon in a sermon preached on providence as seen in the Book of Esther cites Mordecai's belief in providence as stirring him to action and courage in the face of great danger.

Mordecai was quite sure the Lord would deliver his people, and he expressed confidence, but he did not therefore sit still; he stirred up Esther, and when she seemed a little slack, he put it very strongly, "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then enlargement and deliverance will rise from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." Nerved by this message, Esther braced herself to the effort. She did not sit still say "The Lord will arrange this business, there is nothing for me to do," but she both pleaded with God, and ventured her life and her all for her people's and then acted very wisely and discreetly in her interviews with the king. So, my brethren we rest confidently in providence, but we are not idle.

We believe that God has elected people, and therefore do we preach in the hope that we may be the means, in the hands of his Spirit, of bringing this elect people to Christ.

We believe that God has appointed for his people both holiness here and heaven hereafter; therefore do we strive against sin, and press forward to the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

Faith in God's providence, instead of repressing our energies, excites us to diligence. We labour as if all depended on us, and then fall back upon the Lord with the calm faith which knows that all depends upon him.

Vol 20.1874 p 621

It is the most vital truth to press home that God governs all events by his providence. Such a truth will inspire us to expect great things from him and to attempt great things for him.

Nothing will more effectually preserve us in a straight and undeviating course, than the fond

persuasion that all events are in the cause of God, and that he is merciful as he is mighty.
Calvin p 278

II Providence and the Nearness of God

In preaching providence we are declaring that the world has meaning, events significance, and that man's life is purposeful, and that there is a God with whom we have to do. We preach the providence of God because it helps us to realise the nearness of God and his presence in the world which he has made.

One of the sad features of the modern world is that people in general lack a sense of the benevolent presence of God.

There is a way of looking at God and the world called Deism. The deist believes that God made the world, but now remains distant and far off from it. The deist believes that God has made the world rather as a clockmaker would make a clock.... Putting it altogether, making it tick and having wound it up has little further interest in it and moves on to another project.

The idea of God as being unconcerned and uninterested in his creation, far off and unknowable, is a cold and depressing thought. It is what many people believe, but it is not what the Bible teaches.

Providence teaches the transcendence but also the nearness of God, God is intimately concerned with what he has made.

Spurgeon emphasises this truth in a sermon called "God's Nearness to Us."

Albeit that this godless age seeks to banish God, yet is the present in the transactions of everyday. All things come, of him, both the little and the great. He ordains, and rules, or over rules. Pestilence and famine, earthquake and hurricane, are his heavier treads; and days and nights, harvests and springtides, are his gentler footsteps. The events of history, whether on a large or small scale, betray an evident design and arrangement. All things work together, with singular accuracy and punctuality, to accomplish a lofty purpose. It is the fashion nowadays to say that these are coincidences. It is a pretty word for boys to play with. Some of us observed God's providences and we are never without a providence to observe. We see the hand of God in daily life, and we are glad to do so, though we are laughed at as poor fool's. Those who can see may well be content to bear the jests of the blind. In my own personal experience I have met with numbers of singular and special tokens of God's working in providence, some of which I would scarcely dare to tell, because they might seem incredible.

Vol 33, 1887 p 398

We need in our churches today and in society at large to have this sense of the near presence of God.

See page 91 Does God Still Guide? J. Sidlow Baxter

Also The Mystery of Providence John Flavel

III Providence in the Life of the Child of God

This leads us to consider firstly, Providence working for the good of the saints.

There are many and very clear promises in the Scriptures to the effect that God's special providence watches over the welfare of well-being of his People.

Psalm 55:22

Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.

Isaiah 49:25

But thus saith the Lord, even the captains of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.

The promised land was not so much fertile by nature as because God daily watered it by his secret blessing to make it so.

Calvin's Commentary

We need to realise that the people we speak to each week, as preachers are in many cases under great pressure, and they need to know that God is with them, and be reassured of his love and care. Spurgeon dealt with this area in a sermon entitled "Bread for the Hungry."

I could myself write a Book of Providence is quite as remarkable as William Huntingdon's Bank of Faith. God does supply his people's needs, this is not matter of fancy or superstition; we have tried it, and have proved it, and we have so much evidence to prove that truth as to prove any fact which is taken for granted in science or in philosophy. Man does not to this day lived by bread alone, not by ordinary channels of Providence, but God doth still supply the lack of his children, and none them that trust in him shall be desolate.

The second point is, the kind consideration of God, in taking care of his people. In reading the text, I thought, "There is better care taken of me than I could ever take of myself." You all take care of yourselves to some extent, but which of you ever took so much care of himself as to count the hairs of his head? But God will not only protect our limbs, but even the growing of hair is to be seen after. And how much this excels all the care of our tenderest friends! Look at the mother, how careful she is her child has a little cough, she notices it; the slightest weakness is sure to be observed. She has watched all its motions anxiously, to see whether it walked right, whether all its limbs were sound, and whether it had the use of all its powers in perfection; but she has never thought of numbering the hairs of her child's head, and the absence of one or two of them would give her no great concern. But our God is more careful of us, even than a mother with her child-so careful of the numbers the hairs of our head. How safe are we, then, beneath the hand of God!

Sermons Vol 7.1861 p 562

Spurgeon brings in one extra piece of application here showing us that whatever our circumstances are, we must never be tempted to do wrong in order to try and relieve or

remedy them. That is to distrust Providence.

But I have a consciousness that I am addressing someone this morning who little expected to be here, who nevertheless is in such straits that, though a Christian man he is hardly tempted and sternly tried by Satan to do what he knows is wrong, but which he thinks is necessary, because he says, "We must live." My brother, let me summons you, as God's ambassador, do not break a way for yourself; stand still and see the salvation of God; it can never be right to do a wrong thing. This is a trial of your faith. Oh! compromise not your faith; but seek help from God this morning, that you may say, "I can starve, but I cannot sin." And you may rest assured that God who delivered the three holy children out of the very midst of the fire, when they would not bow down before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, will surely deliver you, and if not, yet let your resolution be still firmly fixed - "I will not do this great wickedness and sin against God."

Ibid

IV. Providence directing the Place and Sphere of our Service and Influence in Life

There are many discontented believers who find it hard to settle and serve God service where they are, because they are thinking that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. These discontented ones need to be challenged... as Providence has put them where they are. In a sermon on "Providence as seen in the Life of Esther" Spurgeon makes this point;

Every child of God is where God has placed him for some purpose, and the practical use of this first point is to lead you to inquire for what practical purpose as God placed each one of you where you now are? You have been wishing for another position where you could do something for Jesus; do not wish anything of the kind, but serve them where you are. If you are sitting at the King's gate there is something for you to do there, and if you were on the Queen's throne, there would be something for you to do there; do not ask either to be gatekeeper or queen, but whichever you are, serve God therein. Brother, are you rich? God has made you steward, take care that you are a good steward. Brother, are you poor? God has thrown you into a position where you will be better able to give a word of sympathy to poor saints. Are you doing your allotted work? Do you live in a godly family? God has a motive for placing you in so happy a position. Are you in an ungodly house? You are a lamp hung up in a dark place; mind you shine there. Esther did well, because she acted as an Esther should, Mordecai did well, because he acted as a Mordecai should. I like to think, as I look over you all, -- God has put each one of them in the right place, even as a good captain well arranges the different parts of his army and though we do not know his plan of battle, it will be seen during the conflict that he has placed each soldier where he should be. Our wisdom is not to desire another place, nor to judge those who are in another position, but each one being redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus, should consecrate himself fully to the Lord, and say, "Lord, what would thou have me to do, for here I am, and by thy grace I am ready to do it" Forget not then the fact that God in his Providence places his servants in positions where he can make use of them.

Sermons Vol 20. 1874 p 617

Wherever we are make the best use of the opportunities that the all wise Providence has

given us. There are opportunities of service where we are, people to witness to where we are, even in the most obscure and out of the way places e.g. Bunyan in prison, Boston at Ettrick, Kitto in his deafness.

V. Providence Restraining our Enemies.

There is need for courage amongst Christians. Christians need to stand for truth. There is a need for discipline in our churches... a need to make at times costly stands against error. Satan attacks the pastor. Often we will like the hireling, and be tempted to flee. We need to be like David the Shepherd, and fight with the lion and the bear.

Without courage, Christian you cannot be what you profess. The fearful are in the front rank of those that march to hell. Oh, how uncomely a sight is a bold sinner, and a fearful saint.

Spurgeon goes on to speak of Providence restraining the enemies of God's people;

Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divinations against Israel. Trust ye in the Lord ye righteous and in patience possess your souls. Leave your adversaries in the hands of God, for he can make them fall into the snare which they have privily laid for you.

Sermons 1874. p. 617

We could enlarge on this theme from the account of the evil intentions of Joseph's brethren overruled for good.

Or the Psalmist in Psalm 57 where he says:

"My soul is among the lion's and I am among them that is set on fire..."

Our Lord said to his disciples... *"I send you a sheep in the midst of wolves."* Matthew 10:16

Isaiah gives the people of God assurance that:

"No weapon formed against thee shall prosper."

Isaiah 54:17

The history of our own country abounds in such examples;

Cromwell and Hampton unexpectedly arrested when on the eve of joining the Pilgrims to New England. This seemed a calamity, as they were just such men as the New World needed. But their detention, though involuntary and seemingly calamitous, was, is developed in their future career, the very thing that secured the liberties of England, dissipated the cloud which hung over the Huguenots of France and the Albigensians of Switzerland, and changed the face of all England.

A desperate confederacy of informed by the appearance of Popery to destroy, at one blow, James I, the Prince of Wales, and both houses of Parliament, by the explosion of an immense quantity of gunpowder, which had been concealed for the purpose under the House of Lords. A Protestant government once destroyed, they hoped to restore the power of Rome. But the hand of the Lord interposed and the nefarious plot was providentially discovered, and the Protestant faith maintained.

Again the ark of God is in trouble in the reign of Charles I. the most strenuous efforts are made to bring about a reconciliation between England and Rome. But a civil war breaks out between the King and the Parliament; Oliver Cromwell succeeds to the government, and the tide of Roman domination is again rolled back.

Again the restless and emissaries of Popery combine to vex the Church of God. A confederacy is formed between James II England and Louis 14th of France to crush, not only in England but in all Europe the effects of the Protestant reformation. For a time they are elated with high hopes of success, and nothing seemed more probable than that Protestantism would soon be prostrated in the dust, if not annihilated. But was the ark in peril? By the most unforeseen incidents, James is driven from his throne, a wretched, forlorn exile, in a strange land. The notable Revolution of 1688 occurs; William and Mary, Protestant princes, are called to the throne of England; and never before was the cause of the Reformation so firmly established in the British realm.

The Hand of God in History p104-105

VI. Providence and Testing or Trial of Faith

Because God has set his love upon us, this does not mean that we shall escape the trials and tests of life. In the world we shall have tribulation. Some look upon trouble as a sleeping serpent, lying coiled and inactive that we hope we can creep past in life without rousing it. The fact is however that trials and difficulties will come... we cannot wholly escape them.

Again Spurgeon refers to this in his sermon, Providence as seen in the Book of Esther:

You will notice that God in his Providence tries his people. You must not suppose that those who are God's servants will be screened from trial; that is no part of the design of Providence. "If ye be without chastisement," says the apostle, "then ye are bastards and not sons." God's intent is to educate his people by affliction, and we must not therefore deem that an event is not providential because it is grievous, nay, ye may count it to be all the more so, for "the Lord trieth the righteous"

1874 p 618

Luther speaks in terms of affliction being the great teacher of theology,
No man without trials and temptations can attain to a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

JC Ryle says:

The tools them great architect intends to use much are often kept longer the fire to temper them for the work.

Thomas Boston (the author of *The Crook in the Lot*'), in the first years of his ministry buried six of its own children, and had to endure extremes of poverty... for many years his Church was hostile towards him, talking whilst he preached, after eight years he said, "my heart is alienated from this place". His wife suffered mental breakdown, yet in all this is ministry was enriched and owned of God. He stayed 25 years... his congregation increased from 60 to 777.

See page 13, Behind a Frowning Providence, J. J. Murray

Spurgeon applied the comfort of an overruling Providence to those who were sick, in a sermon entitled The Hand of God in the History of a Man.

I will now give you the sick man's inference – "Is there not an appointed time to men upon earth? Are not his days also like the days of an hireling?" The sick man, therefore, concludes that his pains will not last forever, and that every suffering is measured out by love divine. Truly disease is a bitter draught, but Jehovah Rophi often prescribes it as a medicine for spiritual disease. When the Lord knows that the appointed affliction has wrought out all his purpose he will either raise up the patient to walk among the sons of men again or else he will take him to his bosom in glory. Therefore, let him be patient, and in confidence and quietness shall be his strength.

1875 p

In the same sermon he applies the comforts of an overruling Providence to the bereaved.

Next comes the mourner's inference -- one which we do not always draw quite so readily as we should. It is this: "my child has died, but is it not too soon?. My husband is gone; ah, God, what shall I do? Where shall my widowed heart find sympathy? Still he has been taken away at the right time. The Lord has done as it pleased him, and he has done wisely." It you have not yet come to mourning over the dead, but have everyday to sympathise with a living sufferer who is gradually melting away amidst wearisome pain and constant anguish, ask grace to enable you to feel "It is well." It is a grand triumph of grace when the heart is neither stoical, unsympathetic, nor rebellious; when you can grieve but not rebel in the grieving, mourn without murmuring, and sorrow without sinning. Pray for some who have this trial. Pray for them that grace may be perfect in their weakness. And I may say to those of you also who have been bereaved -- if you believe in Providence you may grieve; but your grief must not be excessive. I remember at the funeral of a friend hearing a pretty parable which I've told before, and will tell again. There was much weeping on account of the loss of a loved one, and the minister put it thus. He said, "suppose you are a gardener employed by another; it is not your garden. But you are called upon to tend it, and you have your wages paid you. You have taken great care with a certain number of roses; you have trained them up, and there they are, blooming in their beauty. You pride yourself upon them. You come one morning into the garden, and you find that the best rose has been taken away. You are angry: you go to your fellow -- servants, and charged them with having taken the rose. They will declare that they had nothing at all to do with it"; and one says, "I saw the master walking here this morning; I think he took it." Is the gardener angry then? No, at once he says, "I am happy that my rose should have been so fair as to attract the attention of the master. It is his own: he has taken it let him do what seemeth him good."

VII. Providence and Prayer

Prayer is an essential part of Providence of God. Some might come to the conclusion that as all things are providential arranged already, what is the use of prayer?

What difference can it make it cannot change the mind of God? The Spurgeon tackles this problem in a sermon entitled....

Unbelievers inquire, "What difference could prayer make?" My brethren, prayer is an essential part of the providence of God, so essential that you always find that when God delivers his people, his people have been praying for that deliverance. They tell us that prayer does not affect the Most High, and cannot alter his purposes. We never thought it did; but prayer is a part of the purpose and plan, and the most effective wheel in the machinery of providence. The Lord sets his people praying, and then he blesses them.

We do not use the expression "prayer changes things".. The prayer is not intended to change God's purposes or to persuade him to form fresh purposes. God has decreed, we say that certain events shall certainly come to pass. But we see that God has also decreed that these events shall come to pass through the means he has appointed for their accomplishment ie. prayer.

We could say for example, God has elected a people to be saved. But then add, he is also decreed that they shall be saved through the preaching of the Gospel. The preaching of the Gospel then is one of the "means" God uses for bringing to pass his eternal decree of salvation. It is the same with prayer God has decreed that a certain event will happen because his people have prayed to that end. The prayers of his people are included in the eternal decree. Prayer is not useless they are one of the means by which God fulfils his purposes.

VIII. Providence and Conversion

Spurgeon speaks of Providence co-working with grace. He illustrates this in a sermon on Lydia, the first European Convert. In their sermon he draws out and comments upon the remarkable providences that combined to bring Lydia under the preaching of Paul at Philippi, she formerly being a native of Thyatira.

Now, I should not wonder tonight if there are a number of Providences that have work together to bring some of my hearers into this place at this time. What brought you to London, friend? It was not your intention to be in this city. Coming to London, what brought you to this part of it? What led you to be at this service? And why was it that you did not come on one of the Sunday's when the preacher would have been here if he could, but could not be here by reason of his weakness? Because, it maybe, that only from these lips can the word come to you, and only tonight, that you must come to this place. Perhaps there is someone who preaches the Gospel much better in the town where you live; or, peradventure, you have had opportunities of hearing the same preacher near your own door? And you did not avail yourself of them; and yet God has brought you here. I wish we watched providences more. " Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord." If the Lord should meet with you, and convert you tonight, I will warrant you that you will be a believer in providence, and say, "Yes, God guided my steps. He directed my path, and he brought me to the spot where Jesus met with me, and opened my heart that I might receive the Gospel of his grace."

Vol. 37, 1891. p. 484

In the same sermon he also uses the connection between Providence and conversion for the encouragement of preachers.

Let me encourage you ministers of the Gospel. Providence is always working with you while you are working for God. . . . Everything is with us when we are with God. Who can be against us? The stars in their courses fight for the servants of God; at all things, great and small, shall bow before the feet of him who trod the waves of the Sea of Galilee, and still is Master of all things, and ruleth all things to the accomplishment of his divine purposes.

So much, then, for the working of Providence.

Ibid p. 484

I could remind you here of Flavel's famous book, *The Mystery of Providence*. This book might from one point of view be looked at as an evangelistic argument aimed at the type of unbeliever who formerly accepts the truths of Scripture yet has no saving experience of God's working in his or her life.

Now my business here is not so much to do with professed atheists who deny the existence of God and consequently deride all evidences brought from Scripture of the extraordinary events that fall out in favour of that people which are called his, but rather to convince those that professedly own all this, yet, never having tasted religion by experience, suspect, at least, that all these things which we call special providences to the saints, are but natural events or mere contingencies. Thus, while they professed to own a God and a providence (which profession is but the effect of their education) they do in the meantime live like atheists, and both think and act as if there were no such things and really, I fear this is the case with the greater part of the men of this generation.'

The Mystery of Providence p 28

IX. Providence and the Lazy

It is one of our tasks as preachers of God's Word to speak of the duty and responsibility of God's people to work and be active in his service. We might come across those who would try and hide behind a false idea of providence and the sovereignty of God and try and justify a policy of doing nothing.

God has his elect, and nothing I can do can alter the fact. All the saved whom he has decreed will be saved, therefore I need do nothing.

Spurgeon tackles this syndrome as follows:

He has a false heart who dares to suck out of the blessed truth of predestination the detestable inference that he may sit still and do nothing. Why, sirs, nothing in the world more nerves me for work than the belief that God's purposes appointed me to this service. Being convinced that the eternal forces of immutable wisdom and unfailing power are at my back, I put forth all my strength has becometh a "worker together with God." The bravest men that ever lived like Cromwell and his Ironsides believed in God's decrees, but they also kept their powder dry. They relied upon everlasting purposes, but also believed in human responsibility, and so must you and I. Your years are appointed, but do not commit

lewdness or drink with the drunken or you will shorten your days. Your warfare is appointed, O man, but do not go and play the fool, or your troubles will be multiplied. Your service is allotted you, O believer, but do not loiter, or you will grieve the Spirit of God and mar your work.

X. The Character of the Christian who embraces the Doctrine of Providence

Believed in these doctrines will certainly affect the way with live our lives. They ought to produce in us certain characteristics they will give us strength of character and ought to produce in us a distinctly Christian attitude to life and work.

Spurgeon says that it we believe that the very hairs of our head are numbered and that providence provides all things necessary for life and godliness, and arranges everything with infinite and unerring wisdom what manner of persons ought we to be?

We ought to be a bold people.

What have we to fear? One man looks up and if he sees a lightning flash, he trembles at its mysterious power. We believe it has its predestined path. We may stand and contemplate it; although we would not presumptuously expose ourselves to it, yet can we confided in our God in the midst of the storm. We are out at sea. The waves the dashing against the ship, she reels to and fro; other men shake, because they think that this is all chance; we however, see an order in the waves, and here a music in the winds. It is for us to be peaceful calm. To other men the tempest is a fearful thing; we believe that the tempest is in the hand of God. Why should we shake? Why should we quiver? In all convulsions of the world, in all temporal distress and danger, it is for us to stand calm and collected, looking boldly on.

Spurgeon says, especially may I address of this remark to timid people.

There are some of you who are frightened at every little thing. Oh! if you could but believe that God manages all, why, you would not be screaming because your husband is not home when there is a little thunder and lightning, or because there is a mouse in the parlour, or because there is a great tree blown down in the garden. There is no necessity you should believe that your brother-in-law, who has gone to Australia was wrecked, because there was a storm when he was at sea. There is no need for you to imagine, that your son in the army was necessarily killed, because he happened to be before Lucknow; or, if you think the thing true still, as a believer in God's Providence you should just stand and say that God has done it, and that it is yours to resign all things into its hands.

This doctrine moreover he says ought always to keep us in a stable frame of mind.

Bear all. A man who feels that everything comes to pass according to God's will hath a great mainstay to his soul. He need not be shaken to and fro by every wind that bloweth; for he is fast bound, so that he need not move. This is an anchor cast into the sea. While the other ships are drifting far away, he can ride calmly through.

Strive, dear friends, to believe this, and maintain as the consequence of it that continual calm and peace which renders life so happy. Do not get fearing ills that may come tomorrow; either they will not come, or else they will bring good with them. If you have evils today, do not multiply them by fearing those of tomorrow. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."