

Pako Evening Service: 15/05/2016

Scripture Readings: Psalm 104; Rom 8:18-27; Sermon: "God's in control" Prayer

Brothers and sisters in the Lord.

One of the things that we firmly affirm as truth is that God is loving and absolutely sovereign. The world may have an issue with it, but we don't. However, what we sometimes find harder to explain is how that works out in this world, especially when terrible things happen.

Let's be honest, when terrible things happen in our lives or the lives of others, it is much harder to believe in a loving God who cares for mankind. In fact, we may even sympathize with an unbeliever's feelings and even be affected by their pain.

And that is the dilemma we face as Christians. On the one hand we confess that God is almighty and sovereign, and loving. On the other hand, how do we explain that satisfactorily, when there is so much trouble and hardship in our own lives and families and communities and the world in general?

Well to answer this dilemma, the first thing we need to confess as we deal with God's sovereignty and providence, is that God's word presents him as loving. Perhaps the best known example of that is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Surely that is the ultimate in love. 1 John 4:8 makes it clear, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

Secondly, let's remember that God is absolutely holy and pure and we are sinful, human beings. We are not God. We don't know all things. We are not all powerful. We cannot be everywhere at the same time. And that has a huge bearing on our understanding of life and events that occur.

Even though as believers in Christ we are forgiven, doesn't mean our sin doesn't have consequences, it does! We contribute to our own suffering and the world's suffering. The world groans because of our combined sin. Romans 8:22 reminds us that the whole world groans under the weight of sin.

Thirdly, because we are not all-wise and all-knowing or all-powerful, and every where present, our perspective on this earthly life and what is happening around us is limited. We are finite beings. We cannot understand fully how an event that might happen today, may serve God's glory and the benefit of God's people in perhaps thirty or fifty or a hundred year's time. We can't, but God can. I am sure that Martin Luther would not have known the full impact that the reformation in the 1500's would have in the church. But God was pleased to use that to build His church and extend His kingdom.

Fourth, we need to be watchful when speak about God's providence. We should never separate God's providence apart from God. God's providence is the almighty and ever present power of God. So when tragedy strikes our neighbour, or us, we cannot say that God wasn't watching for a moment. God never slumbers or sleeps [Psa 121:4].

In this post modern world with its modern technology, there is a danger that we become removed from God. We are taught from a young age that everything has to have logic and a scientific reason and if it doesn't than it may or cannot be right or true. Interestingly, the Psalmists didn't seem to have that trouble. They recognised God's hand in everything that happened. And the Psalms are full of it. The Psalmist in 104 understood that the earth is like a great garden that is tended and protected by the Lord.

Let me put it this way. There is no such thing as an accidental rising of the sun, or an accidental full moon, or a falling star, or the discovery of a new planet. It is not an accident that the rains come, or the drought, or food or drink, or prosperity or poverty, or life or death! It's all by God's power. Everything in fact comes to us, not by chance, but from God's Fatherly hand! As Paul pointed out to the philosophers in Acts 17:28, it is in God that we live, move and have our being!

That is what we believe and that is also what we sing as God's children. "All I have needed your hand has provided." Even the Lord Jesus, when dying on the cross committed his Spirit into his Father's hands. So to confess God's providence is to think about and trust the hands of our loving Father God, who is in heaven to provide for us in all circumstances. Yet the real tragedy of our western world is that most people have a materialistic and secular understanding of God. These lines of thinking have a set of values determined by the world apart from God.

And the tragedy is that this type of thinking is usually presented as our liberation, our way to freedom, when in actual fact it imprisons us. People try to remove God as far as possible when it comes to buying and selling property; family planning, career choices, and many other things. It's my life, my body, my money, my weekend off, my everything to do as I like. And if we dare have too much 'God talk' than we are quickly labelled as fanatics or fundamentalists!

As a result, we have people who hold the view that God created everything but we now live by natural laws and in the light of our reason. These people are actually 'deists' because they believe in God, but don't think He has an impact. Perhaps they like it that way for it allows them to live guilt free and do whatever they like.

Of course there are others who say God is so close that He cannot be separated from anything. He is in you and me, and in all that lives, including the tree in the middle of the forest. However, neither of these views are found in Scripture. Scripture teaches us that the world is like a huge palace full of servants, in which nothing happens without the King's command.

He numbers the stars; he knows them all by name [Isa 40:26]. He sends the lightning bolts on their way. He watches over the mountain goat giving birth. He causes the seasons to come and go. He feeds the fish and keeps his eyes on the sparrow. Without Him, there would be no light. Don't call that nature, for that word doesn't come from a biblical environment. The Bible always speaks about creation or the earth when it speaks about what we call nature and so should we.

Let also me remind you, our sovereign, almighty loving God is a personal God. He is our Father. Our Father God is above nature. Nature doesn't make the laws that govern it, our Father God does. God, my father in Christ, is the One who causes the sun to rise, and the star to fall, and the sparrow to fly!

In fact, God's reliability makes science possible. God's constant power and creation allows the plane to lift off the ground with the wind beneath it's wings. Scripture presents God as completely in control. Nothing takes place outside his government. Nothing can move or be moved without his will.

Now that doesn't mean we should just sit back and let whatever happens happen because God is in control anyhow! Scripture doesn't teach that at all! Yes, God causes the rain to fall and plants to grow but He also has ordained the conditions that are favourable to rainfall and plant growth.

A farmer who doesn't prepare his soil can hardly expect a bumper crop. A person who abuses their body with illicit drugs and liquor can hardly blame God when he has sorosis of the liver! When young teenagers use their car as a missile on wheels, we shouldn't be surprised there are broken bodies and lives and many tears as a result. God has assigned certain responsibilities to us in these processes.

So how does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help and comfort us? First, we can be patient in times when things go against us. Surely Job wins the medal for patience in Scripture. He suffered loss, pain. His wife was difficult, and his friends argued with him. But how did God answer him when Job dared to ask God why? Turn with me to Job 38:4-11;

[4] "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. [5] Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? [6] On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone— [7] while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

[8] Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, [9] when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, [10] when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, [11] when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?

39:1-2;

"Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? [2] Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth?

40:4-5; (Job's Response)

[4] "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. [5] I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more."

42:1-5; [1] Then Job replied to the LORD: [2] "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. [3] [You asked,] 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. [4] ["You said,] 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.'" [5] My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. [6] Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Congregation, let us be thankful when things go well and even when things seemingly goes against us we know that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! If that were not so, then he would not have sent Jesus to the cross to die for us. He suffered, died and rose again so that we may have life to the Father's glory!

Second, I don't have to live in fear about tomorrow or the next day or next year! From the asteroids out in the depth of space; the sparrow in the air; to the hair on our heads, Scripture assures that God is in control of all things. Therefore, I don't have to live in fear when people suddenly die from illness or heart attack. I don't have to live in fear when the mountains quake and the earth gives way.

I don't have to live in fear or without hope when the doctor diagnoses me with terminal cancer, even though it may rattle my cage for a bit. For I know that my Father is in control and will provide all I need for body and soul, in this life and the next!

Let me close. What do we say to our neighbour who has lost his daughter in a tragic accident, or to the couple who desperately want a baby, or the cancer patient? Everything that happens is not always God's will. Sure, we confess that it doesn't happen outside of his will, but it doesn't mean it is God's will.

If your neighbour's pregnant daughter is killed in an accident because of a drunk driver, it would be wrong to say that it was God's will. Drunk driving is not God's will. Scripture says do not get drunk with wine. Furthermore, being drunk and not in control of a murder weapon breaks the sixth commandment.

Don't jump from a tall building and think that God will save you. That is nonsense! God's laws of gravity dictate that you will in all probability die from the result of injuries received!

And some times, more often than I would like to remember, we simply weep with those who weep. For the neighbour's daughter who was tragically killed, the couple who cannot have a child, or the cancer patient, we weep with them. Please don't say it is because of our combined sin or some hidden sin and send them on a guilt trip. That would not be loving or caring. And let me add, anyone who always finds an easy answer with an exact word has probably never experienced hardship.

Let's be real and honest - we live in a world that is broken and suffering under the consequences of sin and we are part of it as well as the cause of it. We are not blind and neither are unbelievers – we see suffering and hurt everywhere! And just because we are Christians, doesn't mean that we will not feel the brunt of that suffering on occasions. To suggest we don't is just clap trap.

Now we may be able to say that it wasn't God's will, but we may not deny that whatever happens, it happened in a world that is governed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, whose almighty and ever present power is a gift to undeserving sinners!

God made everything perfect. Yet instead of being thankful and loving in return, sinful man wanted to be God and fell into sin and death. Yet God continued to show love and grace. He still provided for his creatures with clothes to wear and food and a wonderful salvation besides. And all those who believe in him as their Saviour can know they are safe in his eternal hands.

In fact, even the knowledge that God is there and that we may know Him is pure grace. And if you think that is not true, then just look at those who do not trust God. When catastrophe strikes or even threatens, they do not know where to go or what to run to. Congregation when that happens may we remind them of God, our Father, who through Christ is making all things new! Amen.