

The Mystery of Providence

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[0 : 00] The Learner's Exchange sessions are underway, and Dr. Packer has us going well.

I hope, to get right down to it, I hope that this talk will be about Psalm 23. We don't want merely my comments about it, my comments about providence, but we want...

We want the psalm to talk to us, in a sense. It's a super well-known passage, isn't it? Only the best-known passage in the Bible.

What I want to do is attempt to take this, again, very well-known psalm and make it appear strange. Strange, I hope, in a good sense, as bringing into our thinking and our feelings something about, call it for now, the unknown, the uncannies.

A bit of biblical wisdom, hopefully, in a certain guise, a different guise, perhaps making it more memorable for us. I want to read the psalm as, not about, not on, but as within, the mystery of providence.

[1 : 19] The mystery of providence. Just by way of definition. Roughly speaking, in the biblical worldview, mystery, to begin with, mystery means that which you could not know, but you do know, because God has revealed that that be the case.

You've got that. Providence, further. Providence is, first, we might say, very simply, God in action. Aquinas said that God is pure act.

God is always action. Providence is God in action. But we need something more concrete than that, don't we? The world in which we live is very, apparently, more than apparently, arbitrary.

It appears fragmented. It appears very disordered. But according to the idea of providence, these perceptions are surface.

They do not go all the way down. They are these evidences of chance, of fragmentation of disorder. They are, in fact, the mask, according to the biblical worldview, the mask worn by providence, which, again, is God acting.

[2 : 39] We might say that providence, firstly, providence is that which contradicts appearance. Providence contradicts appearance. If that's true, if you accept that, we then know that providence does not present itself easily as providence.

Providence, if you will, on its surface, is usually hidden. Maybe you agree with that, maybe you don't. I'll put it out there. Hidden, that is to say, to any kind of easy observation.

I would think that providence, we therefore can make another assertion about providence. We can say that belief in providence makes life interesting. In the book of Proverbs, nicely says that God hides things and that it's the glory of man, the glory of persons, to search out those things.

So this introduction, in a sense, like introductions often do, states a few conclusions. The outcome of a look at Psalm 23. Providence is strange, I would want to say.

It is a bit uncanny. It is often frequently hidden. And yet, we know this as Christians, it is to be believed. It is in fact to be our habitual environment.

[3 : 55] It is to become, it is to be the very texture, the very texture of our lives. In him we live and move and have our being. Another word here, this is a look at, again as we said earlier, Psalm 23.

Psalm 23 as an example of a life within providence. It may sound like it, but it is not the theory of, but it is in a sense, a look along into providence.

It is the classical formulation, the classical statement of this, is it is belief seeking understanding. It is not an attempt to understand so that I might believe.

It is again belief, first, which seeks understanding. Further, a few unguarded comments about providence specifically, which you can challenge or agree with or reshape in the discussion time.

Providence is not for purposes of proving the truth of the faith. You know, this kind of thing. Look, neighbor, this happened, these series of things happened to me. Therefore, what I believe is true.

[5 : 07] Providence, I want to say further, is, or in addition to that, providence is not public. It is personal. It is unique. It is intimate.

It is private. Its best language may very well be the heightened language of intimacy. That, for instance, found classically in the scriptures in the Song of Song.

You know, our old friend C.S. Lewis was once asked by a publisher to write a book about the problem of pain. Maybe some of you in this room have read that lovely, that nice little volume. I think it's a good book by Lewis.

You know, Why a Good God, But So Much Pain in the World, that kind of book about that kind of thing. And Lewis told the one making a request that he, Lewis, didn't feel at all qualified to write on such a topic.

And the editor of the proposed book advised Lewis to write an introduction to the book, of course, in which he made it clear that he, Lewis, didn't really know what he was talking about. Which is sort of what I'm doing today.

[6 : 10] Here is a public talk about what I'm going to argue may only be really understood significantly in private. Expand on that idea of privacy later.

Providence is hidden. It is meant to be so. It lurks behind a kind of quiet music, if we might call it that, call it that, behind the Christian's life.

Oh, Lord, my eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things which are too difficult for my understanding, says the psalmist.

So today, with that word of the psalmist in mind, to think what we should think and to think away what we should not think about providence is what we're going to attempt here.

To appropriately, that is, to humbly and to meekly, as little ones in Christ, as little ones in Christ, to seek an understanding of the mystery.

[7 : 16] To seek some more light into the mystery of providence, as we're calling this talk today. A word of prayer. Lord, we call you and we confess you to be our teacher and our Lord.

Indeed you are. So we ask you today to give us meek, lowly, teachable hearts so that we may understand more of these things.

And all this, of course, to the glory of your name and for our benefit. And this we pray in the name which is above all other names. Amen.

I'll try this a number of times and if it doesn't finally settle down we'll just forget it. Because you have Psalm 23 in front of you, don't you? In written form as well. According to Psalm 23, there are speaking better, I like to think of them as singing sheep.

And these sheep famously sing along with Welsh choirs and other groups. The Lord, I hope you've heard the Lord, this psalm sung by a good Welsh choir.

[8 : 23] It's nothing like it. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Sometimes, sometimes the first line of a psalm is understood to be, some scholars say this for sure, is understood to be, it stands for the whole psalm.

And in a certain sense we'll let that do today although we'll be looking at the whole psalm. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. This is of course, isn't it, the voice of, the language of, it is an assertion of faith.

Faith has a voice, doesn't it? It has a tone in principle, a voice which is appropriate to its object. There is a faith which is in vain.

That is to say, it has no object. Faith is not self-justifying. Paul makes this abundantly clear, doesn't he, to the Corinthians. He says to them, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is in vain.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is in vain. Taken at face value, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, I would say is an astonishing thing to say really.

[9 : 39] Faith says surprising and astonishing things. I take it it should not be said lightly, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The psalmist we may safely say, I take it we may safely say.

He would tell us, David would tell us, that the object of this confession, the Lord, warrants this confession. And as one unpacks, unfolds, seeks a godly understanding of Psalm 23, we see that this little obvious distinction between faith and its object gives the psalm its life, gives it its reality, gives it its meaning.

Faith, this just to dwell for a moment on this distinction between faith and its object. Faith, of course, is very powerful, the scriptures tell us.

It apparently, we're told, it moves mountains. The leaving faith hurls mountains into the sea, we have it on the highest authority. The New Testament so highly regards faith, in fact, that it will speak of faith as at one with, as the same thing virtually at times as its object.

So an example of this, see Galatians 3.23, I thought I should mention a Galatians text because that's what David's preaching on these days. You know, there you'll find Paul says, uses a little phrase like, when faith appeared.

[11:09] He's talking about the whole mystery of Jesus appearing, death, resurrection, ascension, gift of the spirit, the whole gospel, but Paul calls that when faith appeared. The object of faith and faith are spoken of as one.

But faith's outcome remains dependent. It receives what its object has to give. Faith in the law, for instance, this is the classic New Testament example, faith in the law only condemns.

Faith in Jesus Christ only justifies. So there you have it, faith and its object. I think that's pretty clear, that's pretty basic stuff. Clear enough.

But if forgotten, I think sometimes we have a tendency to forget basic things. One will therefore, in forgetting such a simple truth, one misread Psalm 23, and you'll end up misreading one's life.

One will misread mystery of providence. Last week, Jim, Dr. Packer spoke about the great Baptist Bunyan, John Bunyan, who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

[12:19] These Puritan guys are interesting, and they're referred to. I think it's worth, you learn more about the faith by attending to some of the great things the Puritans did.

I remember hearing a literary scholar talk, not a Christian as far as I could tell, talking about Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and he said, I think he was trying to be provocative, but he said, it's one of the most anxiety filled books you can ever read, he said.

And I thought that was a, I think that is a misreading, I thought it was at the time. I got the impression that he was trying to be a bit provocative, as amazingly enough some scholars try to be. But there is, I think, a little moment of truth in that observation. After all, it's the pilgrim in the book seeks salvation. He wants to find a way out of and safety from the city of destruction.

So obviously there's a kind of anxiety in that great classic of Christian literature. I say that by way of saying, is not Psalm 23, the famous, amazingly well-known passage in the Bible, frequently read, I think, at its worst as a kind of pious pastoral escapism, is it not filled with trouble, really, and anxiety?

[13:36] At least, on its surface? Its vocabulary should be noted, some of its vocabulary. You notice in verse 1, Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Well, want is mentioned. Want is a thing you don't want, if I may put it that way. At verse 3, we have, he restores my soul. Well, restoration means that there's something that needs to be restored.

word. At verse 4, we have the famous words about, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Death is mentioned in this singing sheep psalm.

The same verse, of course, has a reference to evil. I fear no evil. Evil is very much present in this psalm. Verse 5 mentions, thou preparest the presence of my enemy.

There's want here, the need for restoration, there's death, there's evil, there's enemies. If these are singing sheep, if they're happy sheep, they are not unaware of a great need for a very active, very active, wise, and a providing shepherd.

[14:53] I think Psalm 23 is about providence in an obvious sense. Psalm 23, you might read again, not to bore you, but roughly, someone might say, well, here's a reading of Psalm 23, I'll restate it.

Life is threatened by want, the Lord is my shepherd. Life is a need, it needs restoration, the Lord is my shepherd. There looms the shadow of death, the Lord is my shepherd.

There is evil, there is what the New Testament calls the mystery of iniquity, oh, the Lord is my shepherd. There are enemies, they seek to destroy us, the Lord is my shepherd. There's Psalm 23. This faith is not in any world other than our own, is it? I think. Hurricane, flood, war, alienation, death, the list goes on and on.

This faith, this faith, sees it all and says, the Lord is my shepherd. Faith, again, has a voice, and it is very, it is contrary to appearances, I think.

[15:53] we can see more clearly now. It asks us, this faith, to believe that life is filled with meaning always. A meaning apparently hidden behind many masks.

Masks like evil, death, enemies, want, need of restoration. Hidden and to be sought out along life's way is this masked meaning, which is how providence comes to us.

I love to quote, I will just soar in Kierkegaard, my favorite ten words outside of the Bible, dramatizing thing to say. Kierkegaard said, it is a profound thing to be a human being.

If providence is true, then it is a profound thing to be a human being. If it's not, being a human being doesn't add up much, I would think. I think this kind of observation, these kinds of observations, as simple as they are, you saints here know all about them, I hope it's good, I hope it's true enough, but I suspect it leaves unsaid things which need to be said and embraced.

This far and no further leaves the doctrine of providence somewhat incomplete, a bit halting. Is all of Psalm 23 God acting, or is it about the psalmist's life of faith merely?

[17:16] Is that what it is? Here is what one might, it's as if the psalm might be saying to us, here is what one might believe, you might speak like this. A bit of an aside here, but I think it's relevant, a very high doctrine of scripture would say something like this, God the Holy Spirit moved this psalmist to write.

God acts here and says, speak to me like this, here are words which I want you to bring to me.

Ancient words, or is it God giving us permission to speak like that, like this?

What a world of difference there is between Psalm 23 as the report of a religious person who lived whatever it was, 2,800 years ago, 3,000 years ago, and Psalm 23 as God's instructions to people like you and I today to speak to him, to know how we might speak in his presence.

A kind of authorized divine address. You think of Psalm 23 as you are authorized by God to speak to him like this, the Lord is my shepherd.

Is Psalm 23 itself a kind of act of God's providing? Well, of course, faith says yes to that. But again, we can ask, is it this far and no further with Psalm 23?

[18:46] Does faith have more to say about this? For instance, to use one example, what about those enemies that are in this Psalm?

Thou preparest the table before me in the presence of my enemies. Imagine singing sheep singing about enemies. enemies. Are those enemies, not a new kind of question, but to focus on Psalm 23 a bit differently today, are these enemies a strange kind of gift from the shepherd?

Are enemies a strange gift from the shepherd? Does providence here, according to Psalm 23 as we might read it, assume a very strange mask and appear as an enemy, as a provider?

A bit more careful. Providence as a provider of enemies. Should I, should we, in faith, should we learn to think like that, in that manner, habitually?

Is that, again, the voice of faith? Further, is that the voice of faith? put bluntly, are we further ahead as Christians? Do we make progress in the faith if we teach ourselves to think in this manner, especially regarding providence?

[20:12] The idea as enemies are provided for me by the shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. What a strange shepherd he is.

This shepherd provides enemies for the sheep. Maybe yes, maybe no. Now, this faith would then brood on Psalm 23 and speak something like this.

It learns to say, again, another reading of Psalm 23, another paraphrase, want is everywhere. It is under the authority of the Lord my shepherd.

The shadow of death is certainly there, but it is under the authority of the Lord my shepherd. There are many evils, there are enemies everywhere, they're under this authority. Ah, the Lord is my shepherd.

What a great Lord. So great that even knows how to provide the appropriate kind of want and need and evil and when death comes and enemies and they're all under his authority.

[21:12] It's all a great drama in my life. Again, I think the Christian may speak this way. Our tradition of faith warrants warrants that kind of speech about Psalm 23 and about providence teaches us to speak like that.

And we don't have any major troubles with assertions like that. But here I think there is at least some drawing back, isn't there? A little bit, oh let's be careful, what are we saying here?

Here there is a beginning of some theological and experiential trouble I think. And just here in regards to this way of faith speaking, it seems to me that sometimes the Christian will stumble a bit, will have big problems, begin to have big trouble.

You might guess and if you guessed you're right, I'm especially shaped to speak about this today. Last year or so I've had two or three significant conversations, I found them to be so, with Christians who were going through troubles in their life and the idea of providence had become a total, almost an offense to them.

They just didn't believe in it anymore. They didn't want to go that far perhaps, but they just found it meaningless to speak about providence. So I wanted to sort of reshape my thinking about providence, see how far I got, if I got far at all.

[22 : 40] The doctrine of providence, because there are troubles at this point with the good shepherd providing enemies and troubles, it will be, if not, again, set aside, it will be, the doctrine falls into some sort of trouble, as I mentioned, did with these people.

It will become emaciated, it will be lessened as to what I take it, it should be in our lives. Faith must learn to say something like, I think, my shepherd lord, the one spoken of in this psalm, my shepherd lord is not the usual shepherd.

He's no pastoral postcard shepherd in any way. Here is a strange, surprising, uncanny shepherd, always or frequently or sometimes contradicting what you might expect from some confessions regarding this shepherd.

shepherd. There are other moments in the Bible, I'll just go to some other moments in the Bible that, who knows, maybe they'll help us here. We'll see.

A particular teacher named Jesus in Israel, he likened this shepherd, changing the image quite drastically here for a moment, he likened him, this good shepherd, to an unjust judge.

[24 : 04] And the same teacher took a very minor moment, I take it, in the teaching of Israel, his community, and he made it quite central.

You know, Psalm 23 very famously says that the shepherd provides in the presence of the enemy. Thou shalt prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemy.

Well, this teacher, Jesus, he made it quite clear that his disciples were to love their enemy, didn't he? Very clear teaching of our Lord. You shall love your enemies, he commands.

A little aside here, I don't think that the psalmist here, I think the psalmist was David, I don't think the idea of love of enemies was unfamiliar to people in the Old Covenant.

There's certainly moments in the book of Proverbs that talk about great concern for the enemy. But put in straightforward language again, I think we can say the shepherd of this psalm provides enemies.

[25 : 12] So I will argue providence belief should embrace. The enemies, of course, really are enemies. The shepherd uses them for his own purposes, but he's not unaware of them, of course.

They don't surprise him. Their approach to the sheep for whom he cares is, in fact, under his sovereign control and in his purposes.

For just C.S. Lewis earlier, just one more reference to him. He so often says things so effectively. One of his more polemical moments, he said there's two kind of people in the world.

There are children of God and then there are instruments of God. God can use your enemies as instruments for your good. The Lord is my shepherd.

He provides the enemies in the drama of my life. But this is a, I don't think we don't have to deny it. It's a bit of a hard doctrine. It can be difficult. It will cause at times perhaps consternation and sometimes even a bit of anger, unease.

[26 : 17] And perhaps it should. It makes us wrestle further with God. And that, I think, for maybe for two reasons. And with these two reasons unfolded, we'll sort of begin to draw our little talk to its conclusion.

The first reason is kind of a very general. It's kind of, it's primal. Christians understand this to be the case all the time. Because of sin, the creature has taken on airs, as they say.

It should be stated much more strongly than that. We become, sort of a kind of demonic pride. And we don't, we don't know this about ourselves as well as we should. But all the Bible tells us that this is our, this is our problem.

We don't know, often, that we don't really like the fact that God is God and we are not God. We don't like the very idea of providence at all at one level.

We'd rather be our own little providence providers. If we were providence providers in our own life, by the way, would we provide for ourselves enemies? Want?

[27 : 24] Need of restoration? Would we do this? I don't think so. We'd make it all, once we're in that green pasture by those still waters, we'd say, stay here. No more.

Thank you very much. But this good shepherd comes in strange guises, as we said earlier. We resent the very idea that God is there and he is the provider of all things.

Strange things at times, too. Do you know the quote from Nietzsche? It's an appalling quote, but I take it it's appalling because it really, to stay with this idea, it really unmasks the truth about us. Nietzsche had gone far down the road of hatred of Christianity. And sometimes hatred brings with it its own kind of clarity. You know, Nietzsche famously said, some of you know this, Nietzsche said, if there are different ways of translating this from the German, apparently, but one strong way of translating it is very simple.

If there was a God, he said, how could I endure not to be God? You know. And if we get to know ourselves, we really think like that often.

[28 : 33] We're really angry at God. We wouldn't mind displacing him and running the show ourselves. Nietzsche speaks there for the modern world in a lot of ways, I think.

There were a God. God, how could I endure not to be God? That's a passion in each of our souls. Therefore, again, we resent God's providence. We might try and deny it altogether.

That's biblical common sense, it seems to me. We are by nature, because of sin, filled with wrath against God. The second reason I think is more important for our purposes today, the way we've been shaping this look at providence in the light of this psalm.

It goes back to one of the unguarded statements at the beginning of this little talk. That was that, the statement was that the doctrine of providence, its practice is essentially private.

I want to go back to that now. The second reason attempts again to wrestle with, to try to unpack that observation. It seems to me, I don't know if you've had experiences like this, the idea of providence suffers greatly at the hands of what you might call loose talk amongst Christians.

[29 : 46] Inevitably, we see the other's life, and sooner or later, whoever that other is, we see their troubles, we see their difficulties, we see their sometimes massive crises suddenly land in the life of our fellow believers, and we hardly know how they endure them.

Great troubles come to people's lives. The doctrine of providence, disastrously understood, is understood as my almost clairvoyant, deep spiritual insight, which enables me to not only see and understand the other's troubles, but to tell them much, if not all, that it means for them.

Or merely, by a tone of voice, by some, again, loose talk, to imply to them that they should be seen, what all this means for them.

No, again, I want to argue, we can talk about this in the discussion time, we should assume, it seems to me, that all the mystery, all the drama of my neighbor's life is to be understood at least at one level as essentially private, and to be honored as such.

Private, if you will, before God. It's their drama with God, and I am, I look into it with great reserve, if you will.

[31 : 13] I am not called upon, I am not called upon to understand here. I must weep, as Paul says, I must weep with those who weep, I must rejoice with those who rejoice.

Providence, I take it providence is an art, a spiritual art that we learn to practice. Its practice is mostly about, it seems to me, reserve, words like this.

You'll have better words. Reserve, patience, waiting. The many wise forms of love which we must grow into and practice, especially regarding the other's life that I'm alongside of, and especially the other's suffering, great or small.

To understand providence and to practice it, is to understand it, it seems to me, with that distinction central, right up front. Without this practice again, this kind of practice of providence, I will become an amateur providence explainer, and will bring the doctrine into great disrepute with my fellow believers, and really hurt them.

It will not benefit the doctrine as it should in our lives if we have big misunderstandings about what the mystery of providence is. My neighbor, of course, may very well, I take it, will be called upon by the shepherd lord to seek out the meaning of event or circumstance, by all means.

[32 : 59] But the outsider, the other, however closely otherwise positioned, is called upon, again, to wait, and to love, and to serve.

That's what we do when we see the other's life, the mystery of their life, in God's presence. The psalmist earlier referred to, I hope, provides a helpful language here.

Again, isn't it a great word from a psalmist, when he says, I, maybe it was she, I do not occupy myself with things too high for me. What God is doing in my neighbor's life is often just not for me to probe into, to dissect.

It just is so harmful. I'm to be waiting, reserved, loving, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep.

Thinking and practicing any doctrine is about knowing. I think this is a true statement. Thinking and practicing any doctrine is about knowing what we are to know and knowing what we are not to know.

[34 : 11] There are passages in the Bible, aren't there, which are obviously about providence. They are, again, themselves, acts of providence belief. It made me think of Psalm 139.

I bet for some in the room, Psalm 139 is perhaps a favorite for you. It's a favorite of many. Oh, Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. You know when I sit down. You know when I rise up.

My days were planned by you. They were numbered. That's an obvious providence psalm. I think it's so obvious, I didn't want to refer to it here today. I think this psalm, this endlessly favorite psalm, I think it's about providence in a strange way.

I think, I was thinking about, well, where do I find the payoff punch here where I really sort of make it difficult for you to disagree with me? That's a little insight into my insecurity, but that's none of your business.

I would look to that well-known narrative. It's in the last chapter of John's Gospel, and you know it well.

[35 : 21] The resurrected Jesus. The Gospel writers do this so artlessly, so wonderfully. I don't know. They compel belief for me. The resurrected Jesus, resplendent, but somehow accessible in his resurrection body with his disciples, and he shares, Jesus, the resurrected one, shares with Peter the difficult death that he, Peter, the very difficult death that he, Peter, will, at his last, undergo.

And Peter, so typical of Peter, isn't it? He decides at that moment to look over at John, and he says, Lord, what about him? I think when you change the topic that way, it's something is, you want to get your mind, you want to get your mind off of difficult things.

Lord, what about this man? And you know where this is going. Peter hears the reply, just one little part of it for my purposes today, but I hope relevant, I hope I'm not distorting the scriptures.

Jesus says to Peter, what is that to you? Follow me. A good word to hear on occasion, more often than we do.

What is that to you? Follow me. Peter wanted to pry into, well, what's the mystery of his providential end? The Lord says, is it as blunt as, Peter, forget it.

[36 : 46] You can love John, but you don't understand what providence is going to do, is doing in his life. What is that to you? Follow me. Or, Peter, learn to know what to know, and learn not to know what you need not know.

In the doctrine of providence, again, knowing, it seems to me, knowing this difference and remembering it will make all the difference. The art of living in the presence of God is providence by way of concluding.

The art of living in the presence of God is what providence is about. In the first person, if you will, for ourselves, it is the whole meaning of life. We work it out, as the New Testament says, in fear and trembling, don't we?

In the life of any other, it is largely unknowable, and most happily, we should leave it there, remembering the warning of our Lord, that there's a time and a place when we need to hear him saying to us, what is that to you?

Follow thou me. That's kind of what I wanted to say today about the mystery of providence. Just one little footnote. It's one of my own private little beliefs, just about, because I want to end with a reference to this lovely, beautiful, I didn't, in any way, I didn't want to demean this psalm.

[38 : 11] It is beautiful. It should be love, shouldn't it? I like to think of Psalm 22, as Jesus might call it his last will and testament. Psalm 22 has the words where Jesus, he cries out from Psalm 22, why have you forsaken me?

Psalm 22 is about Israel somehow losing, going into darkness, but coming back to life, and Jesus takes that up as the theme of his very death.

I like to think, on the morning of the resurrection, what was Jesus doing in the garden? I love to think, it's my own little private fancy, he's having no authority to quote, no commentator, but he may be out there.

I like to think that in the garden, on the morning of our Lord's resurrection, he was singing this psalm. How providence had worked things out for our Lord. He had died an agonizing death, but a few hours later, he was singing, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Jesus puts the final meaning into this psalm. The Lord is my shepherd, Lord, I shall not want.

Maybe we're going to sing this on the morning of the resurrection. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

[39 : 19] Let me say a word of prayer before we discuss this. Lord, we thank you that this is the Sabbath, a day of resurrection, when we can sing, in great triumph with our Lord, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

The Lord is my shepherd, we shall not want. Help us, Lord, to enter into the meaning of things, humbly, more wisdom that you have to give us about these things.

Lord, we thank you for this time together. We pray our God in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen.

Was someone praying that that would stay on?

Because it worked. That was good. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Weep with those who weep.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. He doesn't say, figure it out, correct the problem, especially with the weepers. The Lord may, might very well make, for some, his great acts in someone's life, a teaching moment, by all means.

[40 : 30] But I think we should be very reserved, and humble, as we, as we, as we look for wisdom there. Would you agree? So I could go to the psalm, sure, where, sometimes I'll say, oh, you made my mountain so strong, that, uh, everything was fine.

All of a sudden he says, oh, but then you withdrew your presence from me. And I, so, what if I'd been glibly watching the first part of that person's experience? Would I have been plunged into despair when, when the second part happened?

And so I'm called upon to be reserved, and, um, and waiting, and just merely loving my neighbor, and not trying to figure everything out, figure everything else that's going on in her, his life.

But I don't think, thank you for your point. Yeah, the Lord can make, that which is private, publicly meaningful, by all means. I hope I didn't, say no to that. Yeah, thank you for that.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[41 : 41] Oh, by all means. I will tell you what the Lord has done for my soul. Yeah. I'm, I'm saying, especially, especially when amidst of another person's suffering, don't you agree?

I'll kind of, I don't want to repeat this word, endlessly reserve, just a kindly love, awaiting with them, not a blundering, let me tell you what the Lord's doing in your life.

I always knew you had this problem, and I knew the Lord would do that to you. Not that that happens that often, but I think it, it might happen, and some, some Christians get that uppity about, their, their spiritual advice to others.

It's pretty scary. Think of one particular woman I knew a couple years ago, had devastating, in swift succession, devastating family problems. And she was, and she was, in turn, very much hurt by fellow Christians.

She was, very much a, a thorough Christian, this woman. She found it appalling, the number of Christians, she's told me, who came up to her and said, oh, it's all for the best. You know, they were stepping into her, her situation, and telling her it was all for the best.

[42 : 50] Well, she didn't think it was all for the best. She was, she was, weeping. She couldn't hear this blundering, unhelpful, all for the best talk.

You know, she needed people to weep with her, not to tell her, oh, it's all for the best. That was, that was God's business with her, as to what it meant. Yeah. Yeah.

I mean, the doctrine of providence, if some, something like this reading is true, has much more for us, makes us much more bold, much more confident in our God, about, about, the circumstances of the life.

So, which of us, which of us, ask, bring it on, and it's just scary. Oh, sure, sure. Please. Don't, I don't understand at that point, just love. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Unfortunately, they break down, and they say, no, they're still bad. And so, you know, thank you, I mean, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, so, it's just so often, and yet, and yet, we have to speak to you.

[43 : 59] But how, when we go, yeah, on the bigger public stage, the biography of Rembrandt, or someone, remember reading it once, and this author, I couldn't resist, he's one to take a crack at, I think, religion generally, and Christian in particular.

There was some massive explosion in some Dutch city, an armaments factory blew up and killed half the people in the town. And immediately, in the surrounding areas, there was the Protestants saying, well, there's too many Catholics in that city, that's why God wiped them out. And the other side said, oh, there's too many, the other side, yeah, everybody had, the Catholics and the Protestants all had opposite explanations. There's one rabbi in the states who's already apparently gone public as to why New Orleans got wiped out, and just raises risible responses from the watching world.

And I think they deserve to be, just, the Christians are asking, the religious people are asking for it when they go public as to why these big events happen. They become the voice of Providence. God wiped out New Orleans because of A, B, and C. Well, why didn't he wipe out Vancouver? And that's coming. Be reserved and wait, you know. Sorry, nothing.

[45 : 04] I think we can, up to a 15 second, we can certainly tell them why the Holy Spirit is teaching regarding, regarding problems. But leave it there, and still say, this is why God is doing it.

It's why, even if what then is in the hope of this man. And I like to think, as it becomes a broader, in the light of the whole of the Scriptures, would you agree that these enemies have a lovely witness of just how good this shepherd is?

Yes. And they might be drawn to the shepherd at some point. One likes to think so. There's a love of enemies there. Like for him to be with God, maybe it's a type of thing.

Yeah. Yeah. Or for him to show up in our lives is a huge, huge thing. He does. Is that, are we getting on? Are there more questions?

Sir? Oh, please. Yeah. From you, of all people. I love the moment when our Lord's before Pilate, and he says to Pilate, you would have no power over me unless it had been given to you by my Father.

[46 : 08] There is an act of aggressive belief in Pilate. This moment is totally under my Father's sovereign control, Pilate. You're an actor and you may be acted upon by powers that you're not aware of like the evil one.

My God, I bring you to your Pilate. So I think, I see it, but I like your warning there. Is that a warning? To not be too casual here. That there is, there is a battle.

Thank you. So next week is, we're back to the heavy hitters, Dr. Hindmarsh. You ever heard, he's a, he's a, I just enjoy Dr. Hindmarsh so much.

John Newton was a, was a great Christian, so, a good scholar on a great Christian, and that's pretty, and good coffee. What more do you want? Well, thank you very much. Thank you.