

Providence is something that's very easy to explain, but sometimes very difficult to believe. I say that it's easy to explain because it simply means God providing for us, God giving us the things that we need, God taking care of us in everything. You can see it in the word itself, "providence." You just take "provide" and you add an N C E, and you have "providence." God taking care of us, God providing for us in everything. And we might even believe that in theory, because it's easy enough to grasp, it's easy enough to understand. But it's when we come down to the nitty gritty situations, to the actual difficulties that we face, that it can be much harder to see. When we are faced with this particular situation or when we are faced with this difficult circumstance, sometimes we wonder, how is God going to take care of us? How can God provide for us in this circumstance?

But Christians, our Old Testament reading for today from Exodus chapter 16 teaches us to trust in God, to know that his providence is for our good, and that God will always take care of us. And we can see that especially in Israel themselves, because they too were struggling. They too were wondering, how was God going to take care of them out there in the wilderness? Because at this point in the Book of Exodus, it has been two months since they left Egypt. And it's been less than two months since they passed through the Red Sea. And less than a month ago, they saw God purify and sweeten the waters of Mara so that they were able to get the water which they needed. God has been taking care of them up to this point. But now they have entered the wilderness of Sin, away from all the villages, away from all the cities, away from all the fields, and that great group of people start to wonder, how is God going to give us enough to eat? There's hardly enough for a few of us. How are we supposed to feed so many when it seems so impossible out here in the wilderness? That's what they were struggling with, wondering how God could take care of them in that particular circumstance. Because they'd forgotten, apparently, that God had led them out of Egypt. They had forgotten, apparently, that he had led them through the Red Sea. They had forgotten, apparently, that he had sweetened the waters of Mara for them. And they've also forgotten that they once cried to him all the way back in Exodus chapter two, "Deliver us from Egypt." But now here they are in verse three saying, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." At least back in Egypt, we had food! Didn't matter how much we suffered. We want to go back to what we know. Because how can God take care of us out here in this wilderness?

And Christians, how easy it is for us to do the same thing! To face our own particular troubles, to face our own particular situations, and start to wonder, is God going to take care of us? Maybe you're struggling financially right now. I know that there are many in this nation who, because of this past year and the disruptions of COVID, either lost their jobs or they weren't able to get nearly as much work in as they wanted. And so they have fallen behind on their payments. They've fallen behind on their mortgages. And maybe you also are in that same situation. It's very easy to wonder in that circumstance, is God going to take care of me? Is God going to provide for me so that I can make ends meet? How can God lead me out of this wilderness?

Or maybe you're struggling with some problems at home or problems at work or problems in your family or wherever it might be, and you're wondering, is God ever going to take care of this? Is God ever going to give us the peace that we want so that we don't have to struggle with this anymore? When will God lead us out of this wilderness?

Or maybe something that's probably on all of our minds lately, this upcoming year. It's already shaping up to be rather dry. We haven't had much moisture. We haven't had much snow. We may not even get much rain. There's lots of counties in this state, including this one, who have already put burn bans in effect. We might wonder, is God going to take care of us? Is God going to give us the moisture that we need so that we have a decent harvest, so that we can put up some hay for our livestock? Is he going to provide for us even now? When will God lead us out of this wilderness?

And this is what I mean, Christians, when I say that providence is something that is easy to understand but hard to believe. Because we understand what it means for God to provide for us. But when faced with our specific situations, when faced with our specific troubles, we forget everything that the Lord has done for us. Because God has brought you out of situations just like this one in the past and even far worse. What makes you think that he's suddenly forgotten? What makes you think that he is suddenly unable to take care of us even now?

But this is what this passage teaches us so beautifully, Christians, that God can and God will always take care of his people. Because he provided bread for Israel out there in the wilderness, where there were no fields, where there were no villages, where there were no cities, just all of the people of Israel alone in the wilderness. And God gave them bread from heaven. Bread they didn't have to grow, bread they didn't have to prepare, bread they didn't even have to bake. God simply gave it to them so that they would be taken care of every single day that they were out there in the wilderness. God remembers his people, and God provides for them in everything.

But God also puts some conditions on this. God gives it to them in a very specific way. And the first thing that he gives it to them is saying that they're supposed to gather each as much as they're able to eat. This is verse 16: "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather of it each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer according to the number of persons that each of you has in his tent.'" So it wasn't just a free for all. They weren't supposed to just go out and gather up everything that they could get and forget your neighbors kind of a thing. No, they were supposed to take only as much as each family needed, to measure it specifically with that omer, so that each person would have what they needed for that day. And when they did that, it was exactly what they needed. It was sufficient for that day. As we hear in verse 18, "When they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat." So in other words, they didn't have leftovers, but neither did anybody go hungry. God gave them exactly what they needed for that day. It was the perfect amount, the perfect provision for their needs. And they were supposed to gather this also day by day, as we hear in verse 21: "Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat, but when the sun grew hot, it melted." So this wasn't gathering up what they needed for the week or the month or the year or anything like that. It wasn't even gathering up what they needed for tomorrow. It was gathering up what they needed for that day. The only exception, of course, was the sixth day, when they did gather twice as much so that they wouldn't have to gather on the Sabbath. But the whole point was is that they got what they needed each and every day. God provided for them in every circumstance with each day until they got to the Promised Land, because God takes care of his people.

Now, what can we learn from that? What do we take away from this? The first thing that we can learn is that God's providence is not limited. God is not able to do something about it over here, but unable to do something about it over here. God will take care of us in everything. If he can give Israel bread from heaven they didn't even have to work for and to take care of his people in that way, do you think he's going to forget you? Do you think he is unable to take care of you? That he is going to be unable to deal with the problems that come up in your lives? No, God is not limited in his power. God can and God will provide for you in every circumstance.

The second thing we can learn from this is to trust him, to rely on him, to know that he is always going to take care of us. We see this with the omer and being given bread each single day. God gave them what they needed for that day and that day only. So they weren't wondering, is God going to be able to give us enough for tomorrow too? Is God going to give us enough for the week? They had to learn to trust him to provide for them every single day. They couldn't rely on themselves, because there was no food out there in the wilderness. They had to trust that God would give them what they needed for that day. And Christians, we can do the same thing, knowing that God can and God will give us the things that we need. Think of it this way. How do we pray in the Lord's Prayer? "Give us this day our daily bread." We don't say "give us tomorrow our daily bread." We don't say "maybe give us our daily bread." We say "give us this day our daily bread." God gives us what we need for today. And what he gives to us today is perfect for our needs. God will always watch over us.

The third thing we can learn from this--and this is probably the most difficult thing for us to learn--is that God gives us what we need, not necessarily what we want and not necessarily what we think that we need. God gives us what we need each and every day. We see that also here with the omer again, because the omer is not a very big measurement. Just maybe about this big, is all. And that's all the bread that they would get for the day. We might think that that was insufficient. We might think that that would never be nearly enough. But God gave them that bread because that's what they needed. That's what they needed for their bodies for that day. And God would take care of them in everything.

And the reason I emphasize that is because I think sometimes we struggle with that. We have this expectation all the way up here of what we think God should do for us, how we think he should provide for us. And if he doesn't meet that expectation, well, then maybe he's not really taking care of us. Maybe he doesn't care for us after all. But Christians, he still loves us, and he's giving us exactly what we need for our good.

Let me use some examples of what I mean here. Maybe you've been laid up sick for some reason. You're laid out on your back, and you're wondering, how could this happen? I thought God was going to take care of me! But when you're laid out on your back, unable to do anything, it's very easy to remember at that time, what God has done for you. Because when we're not busy with the things of this life, but are looking towards God, we remember all that much more easily that God is always with us. And so maybe God is using that opportunity as a way of bringing us closer to himself. Or maybe you don't have as much money as you would like to have. Maybe you'd say, "If I just had this much more, Lord, I'd be able to take care of everything! I wouldn't have any troubles in the world.

But maybe God doesn't give you that much more money because he knows you would be led into sin, because he knows that your heart would be set on it and you would fall further and further away from him. And so he uses this as a way of teaching you to rely on him. Or maybe even with this hard year looming in front of us, we might be wondering, is this really taking care of us? Is this really what God has in mind for us? How can God be providing for us in this difficult year? But Christians, he's probably using this year or what this year might be as a way of teaching us to rely on him, to turn towards him, to come to him in everything. So that when we do have a good year according to his mercies, we will remember that he is the one who gives us all good things. It teaches us to turn towards him in the midst of every circumstance. Because Christians, God gives us what we need so that we may learn to trust him, so that we may rely on him in everything.

And that really leads us to the last point, that God not only gives us the things that we need in the body, but also in the soul. God provides us with the things that we need spiritually, the Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ himself. All of these earthly things are good. They are good and gracious gifts that come from his hand. But they point to that one gift, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been given to us for our sins, the Bread of Life which leads us to life eternal. The Father has given to us his Son to forgive us our sins. The Son gives us the Holy Spirit so that he would be with us always. The Holy Spirit gives us faith so that we learn to trust in him. From beginning to end, God gives us everything that we need, both in the body and also in the soul. So trust him, Christians. Come to him. Look to your Lord who's going to take care of you in everything. Whatever situation you may be facing, the Lord is with you. The Lord will provide for you, and he will take care of you because he is your loving father.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. We give you thanks for everything that you have given to us, both for the body and for the soul, and we thank you especially for Jesus Christ. Teach us always to trust in you, knowing that you will take care of us and provide for all our needs each and every day; through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.