

God's Pleasure in Providence

Ps 115:1-3

I'm sure you are aware that we live in anxious times. The American Psychiatric Association [ran a poll](#) on 1,000 U.S. residents in 2017, and they found that nearly two thirds were "extremely or somewhat anxious about health and safety for themselves and their families and more than a third are more anxious overall than last year." They ran the same poll in 2018 and found a 5% increase. They also noted that millennials were the most anxious generation.

"Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S.," affecting around [40 million](#) adults — almost 1 in 5 people.

Why so much anxiety? Scholars could likely point to a variety of external causes: the breakdown of the family, social media, political division, and economic uncertainty.

But for the church, I would suggest that our anxiety is, in part, due to a loss of a pervading sense of and confidence in the loving providence of God. Not that the problems of life aren't real and difficult. As we live our lives in a broken world, we will face constant enemies to our peace: real trials, real heartaches, real loss, real failure, and real weakness. *How can we possibly hope to live joyfully and freely in such a world?* The biblical answer is that we must understand and lean on the truth of God's sovereign providence.

The doctrine of providence briefly stated is that God ordains and oversees this whole world and everything that happens in it.

WCF 5:1 God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

The changing of the seasons, the falling of the sparrow, the number of hairs on your head, the overthrow of kingdoms, and the fact that I have a cold today are all rooted in the providence of God.

Psalms 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

We are not sure when this psalm was written, but the exchange between God's people and the mocking unbelievers suggests a time of exile or shortly thereafter. In other words, Israel is suffering the discipline of God. And the question thrown at God's people as they

suffered was this: "Where is your God?" It seemed to the watching world that Israel's God was either unable or unwilling to help them.

A certain football game yesterday left many fans shaking their heads and saying, "Where is our offense? Where is our defense?" The pagan nations surrounding Israel were mocking them in their suffering with the questions, "Where is your God?" And the magnificent answer of Psalm 115 is this: "Our God is in heaven."

I. Where God Is

The fact that God is in heaven meant something significant to the Israelites that we might miss. When we think of God in heaven, we are tempted to think of God in a faraway, distant, removed place. When an Israelite heard the word "heaven" he would think *throne, sovereignty, and rule*. In their way of thinking about the world, heaven was considered a **functioning** part of the cosmos. It was the place of divine power and authority.

People speak of things "coming out of Washington." That is the place of rule for our country. And the things that come "out of Washington" have direct impact on our lives.

The confession "our God is in heaven" is a confession of God's sovereign reign over all the earth! A great example of this is found in **2 Chronicles 20:6**. The Israelites are being attacked by a mighty force. King Jehoshaphat leads the nation in prayer to God.

O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.

The fundamental conviction of a Christian is that the circumstances of our life and the affairs of men do not happen by chance or by fate, but are ordained and governed by the hand of God who is in heaven.

I know you believe that. The question is simply this: is that a functioning faith? Are you able, in the moment of despair, hurt, disappointment, or grief, to turn to and rest upon the fact that the circumstance which has affected you is not there in your life by chance, but by the hand of God in heaven?

II. Who God Is

"Our God..."

A key to finding comfort in the sovereign rule and reign of God is found in the pronoun "our." God is not simply "The God" in heaven. He is particularly "Our God" in heaven. Oh, what a difference that one little word makes!

Think of the difference this one little pronoun makes when speaking of children. Imagine a conversation between a husband and wife. They are talking about a young child who is in some grave danger, maybe lost in the woods, or suffering from a life-threatening disease. There is an infinite universe of difference in that conversation depending on whether they are talking about "a child" or "our child."

Or, to put it positively, take something of great value; say, a million dollars. Think of the vast personal, life-altering ramifications of that one pronoun "our." If you can attach those three letters to the one million dollars that's going to make a radical difference.

Well, the author of this Psalm attaches those three letters to something infinitely more valuable than a million dollars. He attaches them to the reality of the living, everlasting God. This is the most amazing thing the human mouth can say. It is at the very heart of biblical religion. "Our God" is in heaven.

Psalm 95:6-7 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;

let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

*⁷ For he is **our God**, and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.*

That's what it means to say, "Our God." It means that you are fundamentally and unbelievably not alone in this world, and that the One who ordains all things does so for your eternal benefit.

III. What He Does

"He does as he pleases."

A. The Glorious Freedom of God

The challenge is, "Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'"

The surrounding nations had expectations of what gods were for, what gods should do. They exist to serve the interests of men. If they are not able or willing to do this, what good are they? Israel was in a time of discipline. The surrounding nations were seeing Israel suffer, and assumed that their god was of no help. Help = things we would prefer!

The health/wealth gospel has precisely the same instinct.

This is the native human instinct!

But the God of heaven does NOT exist to serve the interest of men. He is not bound, in any way, to do what we please. God does as **he** pleases.

The most repeated phrase in the Westminster Confession of Faith is "It pleased God..." The phrase "God does as he pleases" emphasizes the sheer, glorious freedom of God in his sovereign acts.

Isaiah 46:9-10 *I am God, and there is no other;*

I am God, and there is none like me,

¹⁰ *declaring the end from the beginning*

and from ancient times things not yet done,

saying, 'My counsel shall stand,

and I will accomplish all my purpose (delight).'

NIV: "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please."

So we ask the question, Why does God do what he does? What is the principle directing divine providence? The pleasure of God. He does what pleases him.

Psalm 135:6 *The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.*

A quick note: this is not petulance on God's part. We recognize it as petulance when you ask a person, "Why did you do that?" and they respond, "Because I felt like it." But where it is sin, snobbery, and grotesque pride in a mere human, it is glory and faithfulness when it comes to God. It's God acting like God! It's God being faithful to himself, faithful to pursue the only thing that is worth pursuing — his very own glory! When we ask God, "Why did you do this?" and God responds, "Because I wanted to magnify my own glory!" our response should be, "Exactly! Praise the Lord!"

That is precisely the sentiment of the author of this Psalm. Notice how he begins:

115:1 *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your Name give glory.*

God does not exist to make Israel great. That was the mistaken assumption of the pagan nations. That was often the mistaken assumption of the people of Israel. But it is precisely wrong and exactly backwards. Israel exists for the glory of God!

God does not exist to make much of us. We exist to make much of God. The work of the Holy Spirit in your life will lead you to not only acknowledge that this is true but will make it a source of great joy! It will be a great joy for two reasons:

1. Because your deepest heart desire is that God would be glorified!
2. Because you know that it pleases God to bless, protect, guide, deliver, and save his people!

B. The Marvelous Pleasure of God

God is a God who does whatever he pleases; he is a God who accomplishes all his pleasure. So, the question we need to ask is this: "What pleases God in relation to his people?" What is the pleasure of God regarding his people here in Grand Rapids, Michigan in this the year of our Lord 2019?

God's pleasure is to glorify his name in doing us good! Our God is in heaven, and he is pleased, he rejoices, he delights in doing good to his people.

- **Psalm 23:6** literally reads, "Goodness and mercy shall **pursue** me all the days of my life!"
- **Jeremiah 32:41** I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.
- **Luke 12:32** Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

It pleases God to elect you and adopt you as his own child!

***Ephesians 1:4–6** In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace...*

Purpose = his good pleasure. It was not merely God's **intention** to adopt you as his child, it is what he **desired**. It was pleasing to him. It was pleasing to him to lavish grace upon you – because he loved you. And all this is "to the praise of his glorious grace."

The functioning faith if a Christian is the conviction that there is a God in heaven who ordains and oversees every detail and event of my life — and he is my loving Father.

And God has given us proof. At that last supper Jesus told his disciples that he was inaugurating a new covenant in his own blood, a covenant in which God would forgive all their iniquity and remember their sins no more. A covenant in which God would be their eternal Father and do good to them, forever. After that supper they sang a psalm and

went out to the Mt. of Olives. Do you know what they sang? Almost without a doubt they sang Psalm 115. It was the traditional hymn sung after the Passover meal. This is the last song Jesus sang with his disciples as he set his face to the cross.

115:1-3 *Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?" Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.*

And through his atoning death Jesus has even improved on this prayer. The NT believer does not simply confess that "Our God is in heaven." Our confession is that "Our Father is in heaven." Isn't that what he taught us to pray? "Our Father, who art in heaven..."

Do you sense the passion of God's pleasure in your salvation? It greatly pleases him to give you the kingdom in Jesus Christ. It thrills his loving heart to give all those who come to him an eternal inheritance in the new heaven and new earth. And he will do it!

Boys and girls, imagine it was your birthday, and not just your birthday, but a very important birthday – maybe your 10th. And you were hoping that your parents had a very special present for you. But when it came time for your party, there weren't any presents. At least not that you could see. But then your dad or mom said, "I have a very special present for you – but we first need to put a blindfold on you." And so they put a blindfold on you, and then led you by the hand out into the backyard. How would you feel as they were leading you? You can't see, you might be stumbling a little. The only thing that you could rely on was the hand that was holding you. But you don't mind – because you expect a terrific present!

This life is the life of shadows. God has told us that he has something very special for us. Right now we can't see it. Now we have the blindfold on. We stumble; we can't really see why our life is unfolding the way that it is. But God has us by the hand – so we don't fall. And we walk with great anticipation for what he will give to us on that last day. Your God is in heaven. He does whatever he pleases. And he is pleased to lead you safely through this life and to give you the kingdom in the life to come.