

Provision Vs. Purpose  
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## Provision Vs. Purpose

I'm not going to continue this morning with our study of the book of Ephesians. We'll pick that up in a week or two. I want to talk this morning about something else that's been on my mind.

For the past several weeks I've been thinking about the bigness of salvation. When I say salvation, please understand that I'm not referring to what Christians call "getting saved". Most often, in the body of Christ, the word salvation is applied to the initial born again experience, and while I very much appreciate that reality and experience, salvation is unspeakably bigger than that. I don't generally refer to new birth as "salvation" because, to me, that's like looking at a doorknob and calling it a house...when its only the way into a house. Or referring to your vehicle as a key, when the key is just the way to get a vehicle started. Salvation is the entire house, not the doorknob. It's the entire car, not just the key.

And so I was thinking about the bigness of salvation and, to continue with this analogy, how many rooms and even floors of the house we have not yet even begun to see. Specifically, I was thinking **about the aspects of salvation that are not related to sin.**

The last time JW Luman was here he made reference to the fact that we, as the body of Christ, are largely blind to a view of salvation that isn't related to sin or the problems brought about by sin. I would say that very few are even *aware* that there is an understanding and experience of salvation unrelated to sin. But God's view of salvation is not primarily an answer to mans sin. **Sin is dealt with in salvation, but salvation is not primarily God's dealings with sin.** (draw circle within a circle)

Let me try to explain. Of course we know that sin, and the problems and situations brought about by sin, are dealt with through Christ. We know that our sins are forgiven. We know that our weaknesses and needs are met by his provision. We know that His word can teach us wisdom where there is otherwise blindness and ignorance. We know that through the various ways he provides, the ministry of His Spirit, the truth in His written word, we are able to be helped in all sorts of needs that are brought about by sin. Spiritually speaking we are justified by God, reconciled, redeemed from death. Naturally speaking, we find freedom from condemnation, we can break addictions, relationships are reconciled, people are forgiven, etc. You can add anything God gives you to that list. All of that is right and real and good. But all of these are the aspects of salvation that deal with man's sin and the problems created by sin. These are the things that we receive from God based on felt needs.

But beyond all of this, there is God's view of salvation. Beyond the met needs of humanity, there are still so many rooms and floors that we often have very little

interest in exploring because those rooms and floors are not man-centered. These are the rooms that man speaks and writes little about because we know very little about them. And that is because we rarely look away from ourselves.

I'm not talking about some secret revelation, or some teaching that is beyond the Bible. I'm simply talking about the bigness of our salvation. Dealing with our sin was not God's purpose. God dealt with our sin so that he could bring us to a greater purpose. And what I'm saying is that we generally lose interest in growing with respect to our salvation when we don't perceive how it is relevant to our perceived need.

**Well, the greater part of the salvation that God has given to you in Christ has little to do with your need, and it has everything to do with His desire.**

Lets say I told Kiah that I was in a hurry and wanted to take him to the store. But before I did, he ran outside and got completely covered with mud. Obviously this is completely hypothetical...none of my kids would ever do anything like that. I then found myself having to bring him back in, take off his clothes, give him a bath, make Jessie pick him out some clothes that match, and only after he was all cleaned up and dressed could I carry on with my original plan of taking him with me to the store.

But as far as Kiah's concerned, daddy's plan was a fun bath. He's so wrapped up in his little three year-old world that splashing daddy with bath water is about as good as our relationship gets. We're like that with the Lord. We think the greatness of salvation is how clean we are when its finished. We think salvation is splashing around in rivers of revival and proclaiming forgiveness of sin. But that's not the greatness of the Father's plan. That doesn't even really touch the Father's ultimate goal. That's just making us fit to participate in that goal. That's just something that became necessary in order to carry on with God's plan.

**There is provision, and there is purpose, and the two are not the same.**

When you are first born of His Spirit you become aware of His provision. There is what we could call "spiritual provision" – the things that He has provided you in His Son. And then there is what you could call natural provision – as when Jesus tells his followers.

***Mat 6:26** Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they...**30** Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

Provision is yours upon new birth because God is your Father and Christ is your life. God gives us everything because we are nothing. That is provision. A life that is not our own, and in that life a righteousness, wisdom, adoption, resurrection, etc. More than that, he can help in situations, guide in life choices, provide for physical needs and at times even heals our bodies. All of this is provision.

But then there is purpose. **Purpose isn't what God gives you, purpose is why God gave it.** Purpose isn't known through the things God gives the soul, purpose is known by the end to which God brings the soul. God had a purpose before you ever fell in the mud and got dirty. More accurately said—God had a purpose before you

were ever born in the mud and corruption of the adamic man and needed him for provision. Reconciliation was not that purpose, but it was necessary for that purpose. And right about here is where so many of us scratch our heads and say "if forgiveness and justification and reconciliation with God isn't His purpose, what in the world is it?" And that is exactly my point. **We have a provision-based relationship with the Lord.** But God's desire is that we see far beyond provision and grow up into purpose.

Think back to the Exodus out from Egypt. (Draw Diagram) God brought a people into the death of the Lamb, through the Red Sea, and into a relationship with Himself. Was God's purpose to get them out of Egypt because Pharaoh was mean? No. There were plenty of people in the world at that time living in bad conditions with mean leaders. And there are probably even more today. God's purpose was not to bring them out of a bad situation. He brought them out of Egypt in order to bring them **into** purpose.

What was that purpose? He states it before even sending Moses to lead them. He tells Moses "Go tell Pharaoh that Israel is my son, even my firstborn". There's the purpose. Israel is a covenant people in whom I will demonstrate and exalt my Son. I will cause Israel of the flesh to become a multifaceted testimony of the true Son that is coming, and those who will dwell in Him. The Israel of the flesh will demonstrate the Israel of the spirit.

And we've talked about this many times. Israel was commanded in the law to do and be and behave in every way according to the image of the Son who was to come. They were to fill up the promised land, from corner to corner, with a redeemed people that lived in covenant, kept the law, manifested a kingdom and related by a priesthood. They were to fill up that land with the glorious testimony of the eternal Son of God. They were to cut off the uncircumcision of the wicked nations before them. They were to cast down false Gods. They were to establish the laws of righteousness. They were to build to glorious temple for his glory and have a king reigning in truth and wisdom. They were to be in the earth the experience and exemplification of all that was coming in Christ. They were to glorify God in the land of their inheritance.

But Israel was not interested in looking that direction. Their eyes were fixed on themselves and their condition. Worse than that, their eyes were turned and looking back towards Egypt. Immediately upon coming out, they began to demand provision. Their relationship with God was about what they got out of it. How they gained from it. What and how He provided. It would have been understandable if it started that way and they grew out of that by faith. But it remained that way for the entirety of 40 years.

They were happy to escape the angel of death in Egypt, but then they started to get thirsty. They were jumping for joy when the sea opened up and let them through, but then they started to crave a hamburger. They wanted food and drink for their stomachs, provision for their bodies, something tangible and pretty to bow down and worship, more territory, healing from snakebite, protection from enemies, a greater variety of food groups. They wanted a God that would meet their felt needs. And when He didn't seem to fit the bill they would grumble. They would grumble against God and they would grumble against Moses because He was a man who's face was set towards the purpose of God. They would rather have a leader after their own

heart. They would rather have a leader that was concerned with and gifted for the provision of their needs.

**But God's provision was meant to lead them to purpose.** Don't misunderstand me, provision continues indefinitely. It doesn't stop when you come to purpose. But God didn't bring them out simply because He wanted to provide. As they readily admitted, they had ample provisions in Egypt. They often longed to go back for that reason. The provision of God was good, and kind, and supernatural...but purpose was beyond the Jordan. It was only 870 miles from Egypt, and would have taken approximately 70 days walking 12 to 13 miles a day. 70 days, not 40 years. The problem wasn't that purpose was out of reach. The problem was that Israel was only interested in provision.

And when I contrast provision and purpose, please don't think that I'm only talking about natural provision like the Israelites experienced. I'm talking about all provision, even the provision that God has made for you in Christ. I'm saying that even *spiritual* provision is not the same as purpose.

And my point is to say that we are so much like them. **We are the ones who now wander around the wilderness of felt needs and personal expectations. We are the ones who seek and celebrate and teach the provision of God as if it were all that He intended.** We are the ones who set the leaders in place who seem most apt to provide for needs, call down the power of God, show us his gifts and provision. We love to raise up and follow a leader who promises great things, great signs and wonders, great natural prosperity. We don't care much for the leaders who are consumed with and driven by the eternal purpose of God. These don't seem nearly as practical and relevant.

Apparently there is a revival going on in Florida. I hear there are healings and signs and wonders happening, and the crowds are flocking there. I've been asked by several people now what I think about it. Well, let's just say, for the sake of making a point, that it is entirely from the Lord and there is no flesh and imagination involved. I know that is an incredible stretch, but let's just say that it is a pure move of God. My opinion is really simple. Provision is nice. It is good. It is from the Lord. Provision for new birth, provision for ailing bodies, provision for doubting hearts, provision for broken hearts. God gives these things in His mercy. **But if provision does not lead to purpose, then we do not come to the reason for which God provided to begin with.** This was the case with most of the untold thousands that Jesus Christ healed and delivered in Israel.

God moves in powerful outpourings like this all the time. Nearly every time it happens the church acts like it's the first time since Pentecost or the last time before the end of the world. What is God saying? What does it mean? It means God wants to wake people up and bring them to purpose.

I would bet that just about everyone has an opportunity to see a unique move of God's Spirit in outward signs and wonders two or three times in a lifetime. I'm not saying that everybody sees them, or that people are necessarily interested. But if you need to see something of God's power over the earth, God provides many opportunities. Just since the founding of our country we've had two Great Awakenings, the Finney revival, the Moody revival, the Welch revival spread to the US, the Azusa Street revival, the Great Healing Revival of the 40's and 50's, the Asbury Revival that swept the colleges and universities, charismatic renewal,

Toronto, Pensacola, Brownsville, and that is certainly not all of them. That is just a few that made headlines.

All of these had their unique aspects but, to whatever degree they were in fact the Lord's doing, all of them were demonstrations of the power of God to convict, to heal, to confront, and to help. They were the manifest provision of God given in order to start the journey to purpose. The signs and wonders in Acts chapter 2 served a similar function. Despite the church's obsession with trying to get back to the events described in Acts chapter 2, this was not a picture of the mature church. The beginning of Acts was a picture of God's willingness to manifest His resurrected Son in the earth so that a people would turn and see and follow where He always leads.

The problem with provision is not that it isn't God, or isn't good. The problem with provision is that, just like the Israelites, **that is where we most often desire to set up our camp. That is where we put our stakes down and call our home. That is the kind of relationship that we want to have with God.** We're like the Israelites that stand at the banks of the Jordan, send out some spies, catch a glimpse of purpose, and say "looks nice, but I don't think its worth it". And to that God says, suit yourself, but I'm not changing my purpose. You can live and die knowing nothing but provision but my heart is set on one thing. I don't have another reason from bringing you out of Egypt except to bring you to my ultimate intention.

We've seen this before...how God tolerated so much grumbling and heart accusation against Him and against Moses. But when the people that He had brought through the door and the sea refused to cross over into purpose, where the Son would be glorified in that people, its right there he swore that they would all die in the desert. Did He then take away provision? No, the manna fell for 40 years. Their clothes and sandals did not wear out. He protected them from enemies. He didn't stop provision because they refused purpose. He just waited for a different kind of heart that was interested in crossing over into purpose.

***Num 14:11** Then the LORD said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? ...**21** but truly, as I live, all the Land shall be filled with the glory of the LORD—**22** because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, **23** they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. **24** But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.*

But then we who settle for provision sooner or later grow tired of what we've seen or experienced and go looking for some other aspect of provision that we haven't seen before. That happened to me when I left my Presbyterian roots and started pursuing the gifts and power of the Spirit. And that was fine and nice, and to some degree very real, but it was **still only a greater experience of the provision of God. It was another discovery of what God could and would do for man.**

What I'm saying is that there is something beyond provision. There is something beyond a relationship with God where he is fixing our problems, dealing with sin, meeting our needs and using us to meet others needs. There is a view of salvation that doesn't really involve needs at all, but involves the purpose for which He created and redeemed. And God is always seeking to bring our hearts from being fascinated with provision to becoming consumed with His eternal purpose. God is looking for the Caleb's who have a different spirit in them, a spirit to follow him out of Egypt all the way to the Promised Land.

I didn't start this message on the topic of provision vs. purpose. I actually intended to share about something else. And yet as soon as I started to write I found myself once again facing the reality that nothing I teach, nothing I read, nothing I pray, is bringing us anywhere at all if we don't have a heart like Caleb. A heart that sees provision but learns to long for the fullness of purpose.

The path that leads from provision to purpose is of course the cross. You cannot know, or even be concerned about God's purpose, when self is still the center of your universe. The revelation of Christ and Him crucified bringing us to an experience of the cross is obviously the only answer to that. And its not my objective today to say much about how that works or why that is true. I have said so much about that in the past and I will say more in the weeks and years to come. Today, it just fell on my heart to show the distinction between provision and purpose and to say unashamedly that we are going to stop growing, individually and as a fellowship, if we will not allow Him to bend our hearts away from provision and towards the glory of God. And you don't even have to know what that means. You only have to have a heart to follow the way of the cross and you will find it. That's where the cross leads.

Provision has its limits, but purpose does not. You will eventually grow tired and disinterested with provision, you will lose your first love, I promise you will. Your fire will slowly die if your heart knows only what God has and can provide. It might take years, but your eyes will slowly fall back to the earth. You will need events and enticing words and waves of power and Christian soul candy to entice you back to excitement about your relationship with God. But if you want to stay the course and finish the race and genuinely follow Jesus, you're going to eventually have to turn the corner from provision to purpose. **You're going to have to follow the cross away from why you signed up for God and into why God signed up for you.**

And when you begin to see it you'll realize that you are no longer the center of this story, but by then you don't care. In fact, it seems exceedingly good and pleasing to you that you are far removed from the center. It actually feels liberating to find Christ at the center of God's purpose for all things. It's a strangely foreign but wonderfully freeing thing to have your eyes taken off yourself. To have the life of your soul, which is Christ, become more valuable than the life of your flesh which is your soul. I trust there are some people who understand what I'm saying.

Christians are so quick to declare their desire to know the Lord in this way. But lets not fool ourselves. Words don't matter. Curiosity is not the same as a willingness to know. Belief is not synonymous with faith, and asking questions is not the same as seeking truth. Knowing God in this way comes at a cost. To know Him is to confront the cross and part with something of yourself. To know the purpose of God you forfeit your purpose for yourself.

And I guess I'm just in one of those places where I want us all to hear this again. I want us to realize afresh what it is that we're doing. Sunday morning at Market Street Fellowship has got to be one of the most boring experiences on the planet for somebody that doesn't want to go this way. It must be incredibly mind-numbing and repetitive for anybody that doesn't want desperately to pass out of the wilderness into the purpose of God. And its only going to get worse. We don't have anything we're trying to offer here except this journey from the darkness of Adam to the fullness of Christ. And more things are getting crowded out and left behind all the time.

Some of those things are our familiar Christian experiences, or the many ways we are fascinated with provision, or our favorite imaginations, along with some of our favorite people. You can't connect what the cross divides.

So, getting back to what I said at the very beginning. I've been thinking about knowing the realities of salvation that are not related to sin or the problems caused by sin. And more than ever I want to know the fullness of salvation. And more than ever I want to know it with you who are his body.