

Provision Or Purpose pt. 2
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Last week I shared some things that have been on my heart with regards to provision and purpose. If you'll recall we talked about the difference between having a provision based relationship with God and a purpose based relationship. Without question, most of us relate to God solely on the basis of how God meets our spiritual and physical needs. In fact, it seems to me that few are aware, or interested enough to become aware, that there is far more to knowing the Lord than learning how He is the answer to every human need.

Christian bookstores are overflowing with books related to the provision of God. There are theological books that describe in detail the way that God has provided justification and redemption for the human soul. There are books on prayer that attempt to teach believers how and why to pray for the blessings that God will give. There are Christian living books, where we read of how to better apply God's teaching to our lives. There are books on spiritual gifts where the body of Christ is instructed how to operate in the power of the Spirit to minister one to another. Not all, but some of this is legitimate and true. But none of it reaches beyond the central theme of God's provision for human need.

But God did not create us simply to provide for our deficiencies. I want you to think about that. God did not create a universe simply to become the solution to all of the problems He foresaw. That just doesn't make any sense. He *is* obviously the only solution, but that is not why He created.

This morning I want to review some of what we said last week. And then I'd like to continue on with a few more thoughts along those lines. Last week I tried to establish that the greatness of our salvation is not even sin-related. We try to make everything of salvation sin-related because we naturally see everything as "me-related." We think of salvation as God's big solution to my big problem. And certainly it is a solution to sin and the problems created by sin. But it is far more than that. Sin is dealt with in salvation, but salvation is not primarily God's dealing with sin.

God's view—the view that God would bring us to—is not primarily sin related and therefore it is not primarily provision related. It is purpose related. Dealing with sin was not God's purpose. God dealt with sin so that He could bring us to purpose. And we are usually not terribly interested in a purpose that goes beyond ourselves. We are rarely interested in aspects of salvation that do not seem relevant to our perceived situation. That is very unfortunate but it is nonetheless true. **We are generally interested in God to the extent that He appears to be relevant to our current perceived situation.**

If our situation is guilt, then He is relevant as forgiveness. If our situation is loneliness, we will often look to Him for companionship. If we need direction, then we ask Him to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. If we feel ordinary and dry, and our gatherings are boring, we will call out to Him for an experience of power.

God gives us so much in His Son, but it is given to us for a purpose. Purpose is not what God gave you. Purpose is why God gave it. And if we will follow in His way God will bring us from provision to purpose. Not that He ever takes provision from us. Its just that the more we follow Him, the more we become occupied with purpose.

We looked last week at the Israelites that came out of Egypt. Purpose was not found in bringing them out of Egypt. Purpose was beyond the Jordan. He brought them out of Egypt to bring them into purpose. God's purpose had to do with exalting Himself in the Land that He had chosen. They were quick to accept provision from the hand of God. They were just as quick to refuse purpose. They loved the God that fought their battles, shook their mountains, and met their expectations. **They rejected God when it became apparent that He had an expectation of His own.** I think we are very much the same.

And as I said last time, I am not simply talking about natural provision. I'm not worried about people here being consumed with God providing health and wealth and favor. You wouldn't be here if you were seeking a prosperity gospel. I'm mostly talking about every way that God makes provision for the soul. I'm talking about the ways that He has made provision for us in Christ and as Christ. Provision for forgiveness, justification, adoption, new life, resurrection. I'm talking about provision period. And I'm saying that, if we will follow, there is far more to relating to God than *any* sort of provision—natural or spiritual.

The Israelites that came out of Egypt would not follow the Lord out of a provision-based relationship. They sought an inheritance on the wrong side of the Jordan. They thought their salvation was freedom from Egypt. They thought their inheritance was God's protection and care and supply in the wilderness. They actually thought that God saved them for the sake of their flesh, for the sake of themselves. They thought they were unique among the sons of Adam, special in the flesh. They thought God was man-centered, a respecter of persons. **And God let that entire generation live and die with their bellies full of provision.**

God will let you and I live and die with our stomachs and hearts full of provision if we refuse to cross the Jordan into purpose. He will let you live based on felt need, based on physical and spiritual appetite. And he most often won't say a word about it unless you really seek to know. Paul writes Philippians 3:18 and 19, in my opinion, about Christians who are doing exactly that.

Phi 3:18 *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.*

This verse is not talking about unbelievers. The destruction mentioned here is not the eternal separation of the soul from God, but the destruction of all that man builds upon the foundation of Christ. It is the same destruction mentioned in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 where we are warned to be very careful how we build because the quality of our work will be tested with fire. What is of Christ will stand. What is of man will be destroyed. This is the path of destruction that the wide gate leads to. Not a path to hell, necessarily. But a path that ultimately leads to the destruction of all the adamic bricks laid upon the foundation of Christ. All of the plastic fruit

growing on a spiritual plant. The Israelites of Moses' day all came out of Egypt, but most of them still chose the path of destruction.

Many walk, Paul says, as enemies of the cross of *Christ*. These aren't specifically the enemies of God. I believe many of them are part of Christ's body. But they are enemies of *the cross*. And that is something altogether different. An enemy of the cross is a Christian who comes out of slavery but will not enter into purpose. Caleb could have said something very similar to Paul's statement about those who came out with him from Egypt. I can picture him saying "many of us walk as enemies of the purpose of God. Their end is destruction in the wilderness. Their god is their appetite, their glory is in their shame, their mind is set on earthly things. They will not cross over into purpose."

I want you to see something very important. It's something that we may not realize about God, and it really should make us sober and watchful in our relationship with the Lord. God allowed them to keep their imaginations, and he never withdrew His provision. He allowed them to walk where they would walk, go where they were willing to. He was not going to chase them into the Promised Land like He had Pharaoh chase them out of Egypt. **It takes one kind of heart to run to God for an escape. To flee to Him for provision. It takes another kind of heart to follow God towards purpose.**

But we have to understand that God allows you to keep your imaginations. They don't threaten him. They don't really even exist to him. You can have them as long as you want them.

God's truth is perfect and pure and protected from fallen man and his ideas and works just as the garden was protected from Adam by a flaming sword. You cannot defile it with flesh or with the vain thoughts of the adamic mind. Adam cannot touch it. It is accessed only by faith, the very mind of the Lord, operating in you. You either access it by faith or you live in the vanity of the natural mind. And God will let you live in that vanity for precisely as long as your heart chooses to remain there.

Ishmael was Abraham's imagination. I don't mean by that that Ishmael didn't exist. I mean that he existed because of Abraham's imagination. He existed because Abraham imagined that flesh could secure the promise of God. He existed because Abraham imagined that he knew what the Seed would look like, and how bring him into being. He was real, but he was the product of Abraham's imagination. And God didn't say a word about it for thirteen years until Abraham asked for God's perspective. Abraham finally asked God if Ishmael could be the seed of promise. God's answer was "who's Ishmael?". Not literally. I know that God knew of Ishmael's existence. But you can see God's perspective when he later told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. He said "Abraham, go now and take Isaac, *your one and only son*, to the mountain for a sacrifice".

What was Ishmael to God? A real person, certainly. And one that God even blessed in the natural. But he was nothing in relation to what God was trying to show to and through Abraham. He had nothing to do with God's view.

That thirteen years could have been thirty. It could have been 60. Time makes no difference. God's purpose and glory are safely kept in the heavens and accessed by faith. You can't corrupt it with your imaginations. You can only ignore it. What I'm trying to say is that God isn't going to try to chase you down and convince you of

something you don't want to see. Contrary to some of how we portray Jesus of Nazareth in the days of His flesh, he wasn't trying to persuade and convince people to believe the truth. He certainly wanted all to hear and believe, but he knew very well that what he was offering would be received and known only by those who were willing to trade their life for His. He said as much many times.

He didn't seem to mind when the crowds walked away calling him demon possessed. He never chased after them and tried to assure or convert them. There were untold instances where a simple sign or prophetic utterance would have won the crowd and convinced even the leaders. But Jesus didn't seek out these types of opportunities. He didn't speak plainly, but rather in parables. When crowds didn't understand his words, he usually didn't explain himself. At least once he looked at even the twelve and said "are you going to leave too?". He told those he healed to keep it to themselves and not proclaim the miracle to their village or city. He turned down the Gaderene demoniac when he offered to follow Him. My point is that Jesus doesn't attempt to force truth into the heart. He is quite aware that, despite our words, His presence only has room in our absence. His purpose works in us to the extent that we learn to forfeit our own.

You can think whatever you want about your life and your relationship with God. You can assess your life, your walk with God, how willing you think you are to know the truth, how much you love and want God. You can think anything you want about yourself and what God is or isn't doing, and God isn't going to stand up and defend himself. God isn't going to contradict you unless you drag your dark heart to Him and ask for Light. Can you understand that.

Have you ever wondered why God allows so many things to be said and done in His name that are so contradictory to His heart and purpose? Why does God permit so much false teaching, carnal praying, horrible abuse and dead religion that uses His words and His book but perverts His way. There is no question that it is abominable and contradictory to the truth, and yet He allows it for the same reason He allows anything of the earth that exists in the darkness and vanity of man's mind. He permits it just as He permits Buddhism and Wheel of Fortune, and anything that doesn't have anything to do with His finished work in Christ. He's not trying to change the mind of man, He's seek to reveal the mind of the Lord. He's not trying to fix the earth, He's trying to bring you the realization and experience of the heavens. His truth is guarded by faith and ready to be revealed.

***1Pe 1:3** Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to the abundance of His kindness did beget us again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ out of the dead, **4** to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and unfading, kept in the heavens for you, **5** who, in the power of God are being guarded, through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time,*

I hope you understand that when He talks about this inheritance kept in heaven, guarded through faith, ready to be revealed....that doesn't mean its on lay-away. That doesn't mean that is off in the sweet bye-and-bye waiting for you like a hotel reservation. **It means that it is completely separated from the earth, kept in an entirely different realm, a realm that you, in fact, have been brought to in the risen Son of God, but a realm that you only experience and access by faith.** This inheritance is kept for you, not kept from you. But it is kept in the heavens, where it is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. It is ours now and

forever by faith. Or it is ours to completely ignore because we are obsessed with situational needs.

All of this was a bit of a rabbit trail, but my main point in all of that was simply to say that God is not going to chase you into purpose. Provision is given based on need. Purpose is revealed only if we follow the way of the cross. The path from provision to purpose is the cross. You cannot know, or even be concerned with, the purpose of God when you are still the center of your own universe. God's one purpose is out of view and irrelevant when our many purposes still consume our thoughts.

God tried to lead the Israelites by the cloud of glory into an expression of His eternal purpose. But self love and self preservation cut the journey short. God tries to bring us the same way, the way of the cross, towards the glorification of His eternal purpose, but self love and self preservation makes us take our inheritance on the wrong side of the Jordan nearly every time.

I'm not trying to be heavy or harsh here. I'm just trying to be real. I'm trying to keep us awake in the Light...not dozing off in the dark. I'm trying to share what I think will motivate us to follow through with what we've started and not find our inheritance in something less than the purpose of God. Nothing does that in my heart better than a slap in the face with eternal reality. A flash of divine perspective. A realization that I'm no different by nature than those who forfeited purpose at the banks of the Jordan because they thought they already knew what was best. They thought they understood the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They thought they *were* following God.

I started this little series because of where I think we are as a body. I started it because I want to continue with you towards the fullness of God, the unity of the faith, the ultimate intention of God. I want to grow up with all of you into the true knowledge of God...and somewhere along the line for all of us growth demands we turn a corner from the revelation of what God has done for us in Christ, to the revelation of why He did it. The path stays the same all the while. The path is always the cross. But sooner or later that path comes to the edge of provision and passes on into purpose. Sooner or later the centrality of self must give way in us to the ultimate intention of God.

This is where the cross leads, and I want very much to be a man like Caleb that is preoccupied with the glory of God spreading through a heathen land. That heathen land is representative of our souls. I want to know God this way. I was recently sharing with a gathering of believers near Columbus and one night we got onto the topic of following the Lord. Well, I suppose that language was never really even used, but that is where my mind went. And it was one of those times when you say something you have already seen, but as it comes out of your own mouth you are able to see it even clearer.

I can't remember what exactly prompted it, but I started talking about how knowing the Lord and experiencing the cross are one and the same. That may sound a bit strange, but it is absolutely true. Knowing God and experiencing the cross are synonymous. Knowing God IS the experience of that death and burial, and a partaking of Resurrection. That is why, when I refer to this gospel, sometimes I call it the reality of the cross, other times I call it knowing the Lord, or seeing the Lord. Its all the same thing.

There is nothing else involved in truly knowing God. There can be much involved in knowing *about* God. Lessons learned here or there, concepts read in this or that book. But to know Him is to bear in yourself the decrease of one man, and participate in the life of another. One man is left behind and another is exalted. To know Him, as Paul says, is to be conformed to His death and attain to His resurrection. That is the knowing that Paul was interested in. That is the knowing that Jesus described when He said it is impossible to be His disciple apart from losing your own life. You cannot separate knowing God from experience the cross without making both terms meaningless.

As Abraham found out, to follow Him beyond provision is to leave yourself behind. Leave you country, your kindred, and your father's house. And every time the Lord appeared to Abraham he built another altar and something else was cut away. Its very much that way in you and I. But He will only take from us what we present to Him. He will only fill us to the measure that we drag ourselves towards the fire and ask to be consumed. That is the heart of what I want to communicate to you this morning. God provides for you because you are nothing. But he cannot teach you until you know yourself to be nothing. He gives you His Son because of your need, but He teaches you that Son in response to your desire. He brings you to purpose based solely upon what you allow Him to put to death in your soul.

Imagine that I have a glass pitcher filled with large rocks. I take my pitcher to you and ask you to fill it all the way to the top with water. You promptly take out a hose and fill the pitcher until it begins to overflow. It reaches a point where it cannot contain more water. But the reason the pitcher cannot contain more water is not because it is full. The reason the pitcher cannot contain more water is because something is in the way. Do you see what I mean? I could stand there and blame you for not giving me more water but the issue is entirely the rocks that I will not hand over.

You and I are like that pitcher. There are going to be points along this journey where we cannot receive more water. Its not that we are actually filled with the Lord, or even that we feel filled. Its just that there is nowhere else to go, nothing else to see, no way for us to grow until we drag another rock to Him and ask Him to destroy it. Sooner or later the Lord is going to put His finger on the rock of me-centered Christianity that relates to Him solely on the basis of provision. And when that rock is out of the pitcher, there is an enormous amount of room that opens up to relate to Him according to His eternal purpose.