

PROVIDENCE STUDY 2 - ACTS 4:23-31

As we continue our studies in God's providence we move from general praise for the fact that he is in control of everything (last weeks Psalm), to a very specific example.

The cross is where we see God's providential rule on full display. Looked at in one way, the death of Christ is the greatest example of human sin and wickedness. Yet, it is clear that the Lord was working his purposes out - in intricate detail. The cross shows God's providential rule over history and the human heart.

Stopping and considering this should obviously lead us to worship. It should also lead us to trust. There is a "how much more....." element to this. If this is true about the events of the crucifixion, then how much more is it true about every other "lesser" event in history and lesser sin that anyone commits. The Lord is at work, fulfilling his purposes and completely in control.

We are going to examine this through studying the prayer at the end of Acts 4. It is important to note (although don't spend a very long time studying it) that this comes after the apostles have been preaching and healing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and have been brought before the authorities who want to stop them preaching. The apostles know that if they continue they are going to be on a collision course with those in power, but they know they can't stop. So, they stop to pray with the other believers - and as they pray they bring to mind the events of the cross, and this gives them confidence that the Lord works through opposition.

It is striking that they address their prayer to our Sovereign creator God (vs 25), in contrast to the authorities who think they are in charge. They reflect on Psalm 2 and see that this has come to its fulfilment in the way that the worldly powers have come together against the Lord Jesus. They have done what they wanted to do (they weren't robots) - and yet, even in their sin, the Lord was working out his purposes (vs 28). Sin does not stop God from acting.

This reflection leads the apostles to pray in boldness. They want courage to continue to speak - they don't pray for guidance about whether they should speak. They are certain that even if persecution gets more serious, the Lord will continue to save (vs 30 - it's striking they don't ask for this, they simply assume it!).

There are a number of applications of this prayer - not least the confidence that God's providence gives us for the progress of the gospel. It also brings great comfort to us as we look back and look around.

Sin - even our sin (which we may still be very aware of and deeply regret) - does not stop God from acting.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Very briefly, scan 3:1-4:22. What has just happened?

What have the elders and chief priests said to Peter and John (see 4:16-17). Why has this lead the believers to prayer (see 4:19-20)?

How do the believers address God as they pray (vs 24)? Why is that significant, considering the situation they are in?

How do they view the opposition they are facing? What light does Psalm 2 shed on it? (Vs 25-26)

When did everyone “gather together against the Lord and against his anointed”? (Vs 27) What event is Psalm 2 talking about?

Were these opponent doing what they wanted to do? Was God out of control? What does verse 28 tell us about God’s sovereignty over even the wickedest of sinful actions?

If that is true about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, what does it say about God’s providential control over every other lesser evil?

Given that this is true, how would you describe the apostles attitude in approaching the future (vs 29-30)?

How does a confidence in God’s providence and rule help us approach uncertainty and even opposition?

How does a confidence in God’s providence and rule help us as we think about the way that we (and others) have sinned against him in the past?

What is the result of the apostles prayer (Vs 31 - and then we see the results in the rest of Acts)