

### **The Providence of God (5) God's Providence and Means**

Let us begin today by considering quite a profound statement by our Lord Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel. It is within the account of our Lord healing a man on the Sabbath Day. Here is **John 5:1-23**:

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. <sup>3</sup>In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. <sup>4</sup>*For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.* <sup>5</sup>Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

<sup>7</sup>The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

<sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." <sup>9</sup>And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. <sup>10</sup>The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

<sup>11</sup>He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'"

<sup>12</sup>Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" <sup>13</sup>But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. <sup>14</sup>Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

<sup>15</sup>The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

<sup>16</sup>For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>But Jesus answered them, "***My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.***"

<sup>18</sup>Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. <sup>19</sup>Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. <sup>21</sup>For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. <sup>22</sup>For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup>that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." (John 5:1-23)

We read of our Lord Jesus healing a man who had an "infirmity" for 38 years. The man had lain at the pool near the Sheep Gate, the gate through which the sacrificial sheep were taken into the temple area where they were slaughtered at the brazen altar. It was believed that if the water of the pool was seen to be moving, that the first one into the pool would be healed of whatever ailed him. By the way, the text we read was the New King James Version. I placed verse 4 in italic, which reads, "*For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.*" I identified this verse in this way in

order to acknowledge that this verse was probably not original to John.<sup>1</sup> A scribe at some time in history added this verse as an explanation why the waters were stirred, that it was an angel who moved the water. When John originally wrote this Gospel, he did not give the reason for the stirring of the water; he only stated that when it happened, people tried to be first into the water in order to be healed.

Rather than helping the man into the water, the Lord Jesus healed him immediately. The Scripture does not say specifically how the Lord healed the man, only that He did so. It does not record Jesus rebuking the disease so as to bring healing, as He had done on other occasions (e.g. Luke 4:39). It does not say that Jesus used anything to facilitate healing the man, as when He spit in the eyes of a blind man (cf. Mark 8:23), or He spit on the ground and formed mud to anoint the eyes of another blind man. We read of this occasion later in John 9.

As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” <sup>6</sup>Having said these things, He spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then He anointed the man’s eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup>and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So He went and washed and came back seeing. (John 9:1-7)

We read that in response to seeing the healed man carrying his bed on the Sabbath Day, the Jews accused Jesus of working on the Sabbath Day, thereby breaking the Fourth Commandment, which reads,

<sup>8</sup>“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exo. 20:8-11)

Actually the Scripture does not say that Jesus performed “work” when healing this man. The man had violated the Sabbath by carrying his bed after he had been healed. The Lord Jesus had commanded this healed man to perform this “work.” What really disturbed the Jews was our Lord’s statement of John 5:17, which reads, “***My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.***” The Jews saw this as Jesus claiming to be God incarnate, equal with God. We read in verse 18, “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.” Of course they were right in their conclusion, but they were wrong and sinful in their response.

Let us consider what our Lord declared in the first clause of this verse, which reads, “***My Father has been working until now.***” This is our Lord Jesus stating that God the Father upholds His world and governs history through His work of providence. Now we read back in Genesis 1 that God had rested on the first Sabbath Day, the seventh day of the creation week. We read in Genesis 2:1ff

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<sup>1</sup> There are several reasons that verse 4 can be said not to have been original with John. (1) Verse 4 is not in the oldest and what scholars deem to be the better manuscripts. (2) Over 20 of the later manuscripts that do contain the reading have it identified with marks like asterisks, showing that the scribes were not certain of the origin of the reading. (3) Verse 4 contains a number of words that are not found in John’s writings. (4) The texts that do contain the verse vary greatly in the wording of the text. See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Society, 1975), p. 209.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation. (Gen 2:1 ESV)

But the Lord Jesus declared that *the Father has been working*. And so, when it states that God had rested on that first Sabbath, it was a cessation of His work of creating, not from His work of sustaining and governing His creation. God is continuously working through history, sustaining all things, working all things bringing to pass His decrees that He established in eternity. This is what we mean by God's providence—God working, or governing, in history according to His eternal plan/decreed. We read of this in Ephesians 1:11, “In Him (Christ) we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him *who works* all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11). Here is one assessment of our Lord's words in John 5:17:

Jesus' response is quite unlike any he offers in other recorded Sabbath controversies. At one level, he adopts common Jewish opinion. According to Genesis 2:2-3, on the seventh day of creation week God rested [The Hebrew word is *sabat* (Sabbath)] from his creative work. Does God, then, keep the Sabbath law? If not, does not God himself become a law-breaker? But if he observes the Sabbath, who keeps the universe in running order while he rests? Philo, a Greek-speaking Jew heavily influenced by Hellenistic writers, frankly denies that God ever ceased his work of creation. The consensus among the rabbis, too, was that God works on the Sabbath, for otherwise providence itself would weekly go into abeyance. About the end of the first century, four eminent rabbis (Rabban Gamaliel II, R. Joshua, R. Eleazar b. Azariah, and R. Akiba) discussed the point, and concluded that although God works constantly, he cannot be rightly charged with violating the Sabbath law, since (1) the entire universe is his domain (Isa. 6:3), and therefore he never carries anything outside of it; (2) otherwise put, God fills the whole world (Jer. 23:24); and in any case (3) God lifts nothing to a height greater than his own stature (*Exodus Rabbah* 30:9; cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 11:10).<sup>2</sup>

But our Lord Jesus declared something else quite remarkable in response to His accusers. He said, “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.*” The Lord Jesus was claiming just as the Father was working, so He had been working also. Both the Father and the Son were “working.” Both God the Father and the Son were and are working out God's eternal decree in history. Here the Lord Jesus was making a claim of deity, that He and His Father were one God. The Jewish leaders understood what His claim meant. We read in John 5:18, “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.”

The Father is God. The Son is God. They are working together in providence, governing the world in all aspects, accomplishing God's eternal decree for His creation. We read in verse 19, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”

What the Lord Jesus claimed for Himself here in John 5, the apostle Paul declared of Him in Colossians 1. There we read:

<sup>16</sup>For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup>And *He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* (Col. 1:16f)

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<sup>2</sup> Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), p.

Now here it is not declared directly that He is governing all things, but it is implied when it states that He “before all things” and that “in Him all things hold together.”

The same idea is said of our Lord in Hebrews 1.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through Whom also He created the world. <sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, **and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.** After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Heb. 1:1-4)

Here we read that our lord Jesus “upholds the universe by His power.” This is one aspect of His providence. Did He not also uphold the universe by His power while He was here on earth? Yes, the Lord Jesus declared, “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working*

And so, we have a truth respecting the Second Person of the Holy Trinity expressed and illustrated for us. Our Lord Jesus is one person with two natures. He is a divine person, having eternally existed as the Son of God. In the incarnation the eternal Son of God took upon Himself a human nature, thus becoming fully man as well as continuing to be eternal God. In Jesus of Nazareth, God dwelt in His fullness; Jesus was/is fully God. But His divine essence was not limited to His human body. Even while Jesus Christ was here on earth ministering to His people, His divine nature filled all creation. His divine nature was not only fully present and manifest in the body of the Lord Jesus, but He was also with the Father in His divine essence. We read of this elsewhere, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, **the Son of Man who is in heaven**” (John 3:13, NKJV).<sup>3</sup> Here the Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples, but He declared that while He was standing there, He was also in “heaven”; that is, He was currently reigning as God in His divine nature. But the point of emphasis for us is that our Lord Jesus was “working”, that is, He was working with His Father in the matter of His governing providence of all things.

Now, in our study of God’s providence we have defined the biblical teaching and have described it from several different perspectives. Last week we read the definition of God’s providence from the historic Heidelberg Catechism of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It provided for us both a definition of providence and the spiritual benefits of understanding God’s works in providence. Here are the questions that speak to this subject:

**Question 27: What do you mean by the providence of God?**

**Answer:** The almighty and everywhere present power of God<sup>4</sup>; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds heaven, earth, and all creatures, and so governs them<sup>5</sup> that herbs and grass, rain and drought<sup>6</sup>,

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<sup>3</sup> It is admitted and recognized that the clause in bold italic is not in all manuscripts, but is debated as whether it was original with John. The editors of the United Bible Society Greek New Testament rated the reading as a “C” out of their rating system of A to D, “A” meaning that the committee was most certain of their conclusion, “D” that they are not very confident. But even if the clause were not original to John, one could argue from the nature of deity itself that it could not be localized and contained within a human body, for God by definition is infinite.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 17:25-28; Jeremiah 23:23f; Isaiah 29:15f; Ezekiel 8:12.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 1:3.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 5:24; Acts 14:17.

fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness<sup>7</sup>, riches and poverty<sup>8</sup>, yea, all things, come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand<sup>9</sup>.

**Question 28: What does it profit us to know that God has created, and by His providence still upholds, all things?**

**Answer:** That we may be patient in adversity<sup>10</sup>; thankful in prosperity<sup>11</sup>; and that in all things, and with a view to the future may have good confidence in our faithful God and Father<sup>12</sup>, that no creature shall separate us from His love<sup>13</sup> since all creatures are so in His hand that without His will they cannot so much as move<sup>14</sup>.

The second answer identifies three great benefits that God's people may receive through understanding of God's providential dealings with them. They are:

- (1) That we might be patient in our difficulties;
- (2) That we might be thankful in prosperity, that is, in the "good times";
- (3) That we may have confidence of our future that our Father will preserve us due to His love for us in Christ Jesus.

This last benefit from observing and understanding providence touches on the matter of the believer's assurance that God is able to preserve him, bringing His promise of salvation to him. This brings to mind the confidence in God that the apostle Paul had expressed to Timothy: "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know Whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Tim. 1:12). One of the ways in which God gives you and me as believers assurance that He is able to secure us in our salvation is through our observation and reflection upon His providential dealings in our lives and in the world about us.

Let us now consider another very important aspect of providence. ***How does God use means in accomplishing His acts of providence in the world?*** In other words, how does God use things and events in order to bring about His decrees in history that He had purposed to come to pass in history?

### **I. God ordinarily accomplishes His purposes through His sovereign control of the ordinary course of human events.**

One common cause of confusion for Christians is their failure to see that God is working in and through all things at all times. This is the teaching of the Bible and it is the teaching that has been espoused by historic reformed theology, in other words, Calvinism. Reformed theology teaches that God brings to pass all things in that He has decreed all things that occur in the history of the world. But in all of God's works, we acknowledge that He is neither the direct author nor cause of evil. Nevertheless He controls all evil that transpires.

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<sup>7</sup> John 9:3.

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 22:2.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 10:29-30; Proverbs 16:33.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 5:3; James 1:3, Psalm 39:9; Job 1:21f.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Deuteronomy 8:10.

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 55:22; Romans 5:3-6.

<sup>13</sup> Romans 8:38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Job 1:12; 2:6; Proverbs 21:1; Acts 17:25.

We can point once again to Job's story to show that this is the case. We know that the devil is the one who brought "evil" upon Job and his family. Yet we can also read of God's involvement in verses like this:

Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for ***all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him***. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. (Job 42:11)

Many do not see God's involvement in all things. They believe that God is withdrawn from His world, or at least from a significant part of the world. The world operates on its own, for God created it to be self-sustaining, or so it is wrongly assumed by many. They therefore believe that God only intervenes now and then when He needs to do something special on behalf of people. We would argue that the theology of Arminianism<sup>15</sup> is what promotes this kind of thinking. And by the term Arminianism we are speaking of those who do not believe in the sovereignty of God over all His world. Arminians believe that God, in order to retain for man his free will and therefore his moral responsibility, has withdrawn from active involvement in every area of life. They divide the "world" into the physical sphere and the moral sphere. They try and argue that while God is in control of the physical sphere, He does not control the moral sphere of mankind. This must be so if man is to be regarded as a "free" moral agent. Here is how one described it:

However, the moment the counsel of God was also extended to include the moral world, opposition arose on all sides. Here the counsel of God ended, it was said. This, after all, is the special domain of humans, a domain which they act as the shapers of their own destiny.

With a view to safeguarding human freedom, responsibility, guilt (etc.), Pelagius (forerunner of Arminian "free will"-Lars) drew a line of distinction between the natural and moral world, between the "capacity to" and the "will to," and in each case withdrew the latter from the counsel and providence of God. All forms of Pelagianism<sup>16</sup> aim to make the moral world, in part or whole, independent of God. Both on its own merits and quite generally, however, this attempt must be rejected.

In the first place, it is incompatible with Scripture. Granted, Scripture at all times and in no uncertain terms insists on the moral nature of human beings, but it never tries to do this by effecting a dualistic split between the natural and the moral world and by withdrawing the latter from God's governance. God's counsel extends to all things, also to those that belong to the moral world, evil as well as good.

Furthermore, such a split is impossible. The world, by its very design, is one organic whole. The two spheres, nature and morality, are most closely interconnected and interpenetrate each other at all times. The two, though certainly distinct, are never separated. One cannot designate a point in creation where the counsel and the governance of God and the independent will and action of humans begin. Especially in this century the historic and organic view of things has at every point driven out and condemned this Pelagian spirit. This dualism, moreover, would withdraw the largest and most important part of the world from God's counsel and slip it into the hands of chance and caprice. Indeed, in that case the world would in large part be taken away not only from God's counsel and

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<sup>15</sup> Arminianism is the teaching that God is not sovereign in dispensing of salvation only to sinners whom He elected to be saved before creation (cf. Eph. 1:4). This teaching was promoted by Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). His followers, or those who teach that man is saved by his "free will" rather than by God's grace alone, are known as Arminians.

<sup>16</sup> Pelagius (AD 354 – 418) taught that sin had not so affected man as to render him unable to respond to God's salvation by his own free will, even apart from God's grace. Augustine withstood and refuted Pelagius and the teaching (Pelagianism). Before long a moderating position arose known as semi-Pelagianism, which taught that man saves himself by his own free will but with the help of God's grace. Arminianism is also semi-Pelagianism. In contrast, Reformed theology is Calvinistic, or may also be called Augustinianism, after Augustine who also promoted the biblical teaching that salvation is wholly due and through God's grace alone.

will, but even from his knowledge.<sup>17</sup> If God and his human creatures can only be conceived as competitors, and if the one can only retain his freedom and independence at the expense of the other, then God has to be increasingly restricted in both knowledge and in will. Pelagianism, accordingly, banishes God from his world. It leads to both Deism and atheism and enthrones human arbitrariness and folly. Therefore, the solution of the problem must be sought in another direction. It must be sought in the fact that God—because he is God and the universe is his creation—by the infinitely majestic activity of his knowing and willing, does not destroy but instead creates and maintains the freedom and independence of his creatures.<sup>18</sup>

The result of this is that most people who are Arminian (or Pelagian or semi-Pelagian) only see God at work when He intervenes, when He does something remarkable or miraculous. They do not see God or His Son “working” continuously governing His creation according to His decree unto its appointed end. These Christians, indeed most Christians, have a worldview in which God is largely outside of history. People are acting out their lives according to their own free will and God is sitting back passively, watching and letting them do their thing. These Christians believe that God intervenes from time to time in the affairs of mankind to do a miracle or perform some act to accomplish His purpose. Since this is the case, miracles are longed for. These people desire to see God “work” in their lives. Consequently they are always looking for, praying for, and exalting what appear to be miraculous events, for then and only then do they see God as doing something significant. This is a very limited and distorted view of God’s work of Providence. People who understand God’s providence in this way are very vulnerable to deception. They are much unformed and sadly deficient in their view of God. They talk a great deal about the need for great faith. But whatever faith they can generate for themselves is a faith in a little God.

The Bible teaches that God is controlling all events in history ultimately to accomplish His purposes. The Lord Jesus said it this way, “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working*” (John 5:17). God is always working in all things. We read in Ephesians that God “*is working all things after the counsel of His own will*” (Eph. 1:11). Since this is the case we should recognize that God ordinarily uses ordinary means to further His purposes. God uses such things as laws of nature, laws of cause and effect, man’s free and independent actions to perform His will in the lives of His people and those who do not know Him. And yet, people are always looking for the miraculous, as if that is when God is “really” working.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that...

## **II. God is free in His providence to work outside of the ordinary use of means.**

Although God most commonly works His providence through the use of ordinary means, God may from time to time work outside the ordinary in order to accomplish His purposes. Our *Confession of Faith of 1689* gives a good and succinct statement regarding God’s use of means in His work of providence. It reads in this way,

1. God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.
2. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without his

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<sup>17</sup> Here Herman Bavinck anticipates the theology of “open Theism” which has only been around for a little over a decade.

<sup>18</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, God and Creation (Baker Academic, 2004), pp. 376f.

providence; yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

3. *God, in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at his pleasure.*

The confession states that God may at times work *without* means, *above* means, or *against* means, when it pleases Him. The confession cites some examples of each of these ways in which God employs means.

First, that *God is able to work “outside”* (without) *means* is seen in **Hosea 1:7**. There we read of God’s promise that He would deliver His people without the use of means.

But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”

Another example of this manner of God working is the healing that our Lord Jesus brought to the impotent man who lay beside the pool at the Sheep Gate. The Lord Jesus healed him without means. Then He commanded the man to take up his bed and walk. The Lord Jesus did not put the man into the pool in order to be healed. He did not spit into his eyes or spit in the dust and make a wet clay to place on the man’s eyelids. Those would be examples of God using means, and sometimes the Lord did so. But with this man our Lord Jesus worked *outside* of means. God can do that when it suits His purposes.

Second, however, the Lord *is able to work “above” means*. This occurred when God enabled Abraham and Sarah to bear a child even though they were too old to have children.

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Rom. 4:19ff)

God was able to enable Abraham and Sarah to have a child through ordinary means but for them was humanly impossible. God performed a miracle that working “above” means.

We might say that the Lord Jesus worked His act of providence in healing the blind man with His spit thereby showing us that He can accomplish His will in the world *above* means. I can spit into an eye of a blind man, but no healing will result. When the Lord did so, He used that clay in a miraculous way. The Lord worked *above* means.

Third, *God is able to work “against”* (contrary to) *means*. This is illustrated in several different places in the Book of Daniel. We read in Daniel 3 of the account of God miraculously saving the three Hebrew youths from the fiery furnace. The fire was so hot that it consumed the Babylonian men that threw the three Hebrew boys into the furnace, but God would not allow that fire to consume the boys. Here God accomplished His providential purposes through performing a miracle “against” ordinary means.

And so, we have these biblical examples of God in His work of providence, working outside of means, above means, and even against means.

What may we take with us as we leave here and engage the world about us? Let us recognize and acknowledge the presence and the activity of God working in our midst throughout each day and in every place. Let us see the fall of a sparrow as the work of our Father, even that of the Lord Jesus. For our Lord Jesus taught:

“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? *And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.* <sup>30</sup>But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup>Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Matt. 10:29-31)

Our Lord taught that the providence of God involves the ordinary events we observe in nature. And when we do observe them, knowing that it is a manifestation of the providence of God, it should rekindle faith in us that He will care for us, for to Him we are far more important than sparrows.

But let us not be as the Pelagians or Arminians, who carve out arenas of the world in which God is not in sovereign control, accomplishing all of His will that He determined wholly and unchangeably regarding all things. God's providence should not be removed from the matter of people coming to salvation. For here it is most important to retain the necessity of God's work of bringing to pass His will, otherwise who could be saved from their sin?

Here are Charles Spurgeon's words about those who would remove God from the throne of governing people in the matter of their salvation:

There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth, and we proclaim an *enthroned* God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as *He* thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.

“Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth,  
in the seas, and all deep places” (Psalm 135:6).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> From Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*.