

The Providence of God in Proving Jesus Death Luke 23:50 - 56

50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man 51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; 52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. 54 It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes.

And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Last week we witnessed Jesus death on the cross and we noted that His death was accompanied by supernatural events. Miracles. Earthquakes. Old Testament saints coming out of the tombs. Supernatural darkness for 3 hours. The curtain in the temple being rent into two pieces, top to bottom.

Those things were the hand of God at work in miraculous ways. The biggest miracle is that Jesus sovereignly controlled His own death, the exact timing of His final breath.

But this week we want to dwell not on miracles, graves opening, huge curtains that some historians say was 2 feet thick, rending itself in two, supernatural blackness of darkness for 3 hours, and Jesus supernatural control over the very moment of His death, but rather on something far more miraculous and impossible than even the miracles of God, and that is the providence of God.

Think for a moment about the familiar verse in Roman 8:28;

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

The verse clearly states that God causes all things to work together. Period. The fact that He orchestrates all of that providence for our good is secondary

to the truth that He orchestrates all providence. All things! Good for us only because our good is aligned with ultimate purpose. Bad for those who hate God.

Do you ever have steam coming out of your ears because you can't find the car keys and you're going to be late to a meeting or work or something. And then you find them and hurry off to your meeting and pass a massive wreck on the way. 90 seconds earlier and it could have been you. Providence.

In 1964 when I was 12 we were riding up the freeway in southern California in my grandmother's new Lincoln Continental and we came upon an accident that involved a ruptured tanker truck of deadly ammonia gas.

My grandfather had explained to my grandmother about a new feature in that car. The air conditioner and heater controls had a recirculate feature that blocked the outside air and recirculated the air inside the cars cabin. We take that for granted now, but that was something brand new in 1964. My grandmother quickly turned the control to recirc. We drove through the mess unharmed while many others actually got sick from the poisonous gas.

That's providence. Providence is the combination of everything that's happening in space and time under the mighty hand of God to further His purposes, both good and evil. God does no evil. God allows evil in a fallen world, ruled by Satan, to accomplish His purposes.

You might ask, why would God allow a tanker truck of ammonium to rupture on the freeway and even cause some deaths. I actually know the answer to that question. Are you ready? That's above my pay grade to know, and it's above yours too. God is a sovereign King, a GREAT King, and He doesn't tell us why He does or allows what He does.

All we need to know is a single promise about that. *28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

We're on a need to know basis. What's actually more astonishing is how much He *has* revealed and told us that we're too lazy and careless to find out. It's like, why would I tell you my purposes for the ammonia truck when you haven't bothered to study and understand and learn everything I did in fact reveal.

We ask a lot of stupid questions from a place of ignorance of what has been revealed.

Amos 6:6 If a ram's horn sounds in a city, do the people not tremble?

Are you like me? When the air raid siren goes off I say to myself, it's noon. If it goes off at 9:00 AM and is unsilenced, I might well tremble. Something is wrong. Something is happening that I might be wise to find out. We might click on google and read, China has launched one of those missiles that can go around the world and land on a corn flakes box that they have programmed it to land on.

Amos 6:6b If calamity comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

The same sovereign King who has promised good to those who love and serve Him, also promises judgement to those who hate Him and rebel against Him.

The providence of God is inscrutable. That's a theological term. It means your brain is too small to understand why God allows what He allows and does what He does. He is in control of every molecule, every atom, of all things created at all times.

In the near future when nuclear weapons are in flight to their respective targets, God will own every atom of every element of the different components that make up the bomb. If some little electronic circuit has corroded during storage and the bomb hits the ground and burrows in and doesn't go off, God did that.

And if it works perfectly and destroys an entire city with thousands of lives,

God owned every atom that combined with other atom to wreak destruction. He owns it all.

You're thinking to yourselves, you could have stopped at inscrutable Jim. Why did you set my mind to thinking about the fact that God owns and controls every atom in a nuclear holocaust. That's what inscrutable means. We default to blind trust that God in His ownership of every thing, can cause good for those who love Him, those who He owns.

That might be a reason to come out of rebellion and into His love and ownership. Right? God allowed His only Son to suffer terribly and die the death of a common criminal. But look at the good that came from that single providential sovereign act.

Millions upon millions, like the sand of the seashore or the stars above us, were freed from their sins and enabled to be adopted by God to be sons and fellow heirs with Jesus for all of eternity. Astonishing evil wrought astonishing glory and good by God's design.

Lu. 23: 49 And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things.

If we could somehow enter into the atomic structures, the molecules and mass of those witnessing these events, along with their spirits, God breathed, that do not have atoms and structure, of those standing at a distance watching, we can only imagine the broken hearts.

What is God doing? How can Jesus die? How can messiah die? Simeon the aged prophet in the temple told Mary;

Lu. 2:34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed— 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

We can only imagine the sword piercing Mary's soul as the soldier thrust a spear into Jesus side after He gave up His spirit in death. Actually we can't imagine the trauma and pain of those moments.

And yet God in His providence caused sons like the sand of the seashore and the stars in the sky to be possible, to be adopted, to belong to God, purchased out of sin, cleansed and made new because Jesus received the punishment and death that every one of them was due.

We will stand righteous before God, welcomed into His kingdom to celebrate the wedding feast for His son, with a righteousness, not our own, given to us, the righteousness of this same Jesus.

How remote that must have seemed as these witnesses who loved Jesus more than anything in this world, gazed at Him, lifeless, on that cross. All in God's providence. He allows the broken and distraught hearts. He replaces the trauma and heartbreak with joy. In His time.

This morning, we want to consider the providence of God working during Jesus death and burial. God used miracles to astonish and convict the multitudes and even some of the priests who looked on as Jesus was crucified. But He used providence of events to prove forever that Jesus was actually dead and buried in order that no one could ever credibly disprove the resurrection on the third day.

The silliness has gone on for centuries. Books like "The Passover Plot" that want to say that Jesus wasn't really dead, that he was laid in a tomb alive, and revived and appeared alive after the crucifixion because He never really died.

It takes far more faith to believe that kind of silliness, actually wickedness, because you have to set your mind to believe the unbelievable because you desire a wicked end instead of the truth.

God set in place, providentially, a sequence of events that prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was in fact dead when they took Him down off

of that cross. Let's look at bits of all 4 gospel accounts, a harmony of the different witnesses, in order to see the sequence of events surrounding Jesus burial, that prove He really was dead.

We'll begin with John's account; John 19

31 The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

John uses this word *Jews* very often to describe not all persons of jewish nationality, but the ruling class of jews in Israel, the scribes and priests and pharisees, the chief priests, the Sanhedrin of 70 elders plus the High Priest who were what Luke simply calls "the council" in his description.

So the "jews" the rulers, because it was friday, and the Sabbath begins on sundown of that day, and because this was a "high" sabbath because passover which normally was on the 14th day of the month irregardless of what day that fell on, in this case, passover aligns with the sabbath day, making it an especially high day, they want this crucifixion business cleaned up and gone before the sabbath begins.

They don't want a bunch of dead bodies defiling the place during this extra high sabbath day which is also the passover. These men are responsible for the murder of an innocent man but in their hypocrisy, Jesus is just an unfortunate mess to get cleaned up before High Sabbath day Passover.

Now death by crucifixion could drag on for up to 3 days of suffering before some extremely physically strong person might finally succumb. The crucified men went up at 9:00 that morning, it's 3:00 in the afternoon, sundown is coming, and they want Pilate to order that the bones in the legs of these men be shattered by a large lead sledge hammer, and that causes almost imminent death by suffocation.

Breathing is only possible by pushing up with your legs. Once the legs are shattered death comes really quick by suffocation. That's what these fine religious men have come to ask Pilate to accomplish. Get this mess cleaned up before sundown please so we can celebrate our Holy day.

By the way, they have compromised their own ceremonial cleansing to go into Pilate to ask him to get this done. But nevermind their own trivial rules if it accomplishes the greater good I guess. Hypocrites being hypocrites. Calling the disciples out for gleaning wheat on the sabbath because they were hungry, but it's OK for them to become ceremonially unclean on the high sabbath.

The insanity and hypocrisy of bending the truth to accomplish your own agenda. We see it in the news every day. Calling evil good and good evil, for your own agenda. Nothing new under the sun. Break their legs and get the mess cleaned up please so it won't interfere with our righteousness. There's almost a ghoulishness to their anxiety to know Jesus is in fact dead. They don't want him alive on a cross for 2 more days. They don't want Him alive for 2 more minutes. Still in John 19;

32 The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him; 33 but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs; 34 but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water.

Pilate complies and the soldiers are sent to accomplish the task. The two thieves on either side of Jesus, were still alive, and might have remained alive for up to 2 more days.

Think about what Jesus told the repentant thief who believed; Today. Today, you will be with me in Paradise. Not tomorrow, not two days from now when you finally perish. Today.

God uses providence, the request of evil hypocritical wicked religious men, to accomplish the prophecy of Jesus. Today you will be with me in paradise.

The soldiers broke his legs. He was still alive. They shattered his leg bones and quickly, within perhaps an hour or so of Jesus death, that man was in Paradise with his Lord. Caused by providence. No miracles there.

The other thief entered hell sooner than he would have, by the providence of God. But something much more important is happening, providentially.

When they get to Jesus, he's already dead. There's no reason to swing that mallet and shatter his bones, He's dead. Mission accomplished. But just to be doubly sure, these are good beaurocratic soldiers, just to double down, one of the soldiers thrusts a spear into the pericadium of Jesus, and water and blood gush out.

After death, the water and blood separate, and if that spear ruptures the pericardium sack, water will gush out along with blood. Grotesque to think about, but God in His providence is settling the question of Jesus death, once for all. No need to break His legs, He is very dead. But proof beyond a shadow of a doubt, in case anyone should ask, He is pierced and water and blood gush out of Him. Proof beyond a shadow of a doubt, this man is very dead.

But providence doesn't stop there; John 19:

35 And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. 36 For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." 37 And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

These soldiers, under orders, are unwittingly accomplishing prophecies of 500 to 700 years earlier. Jesus is the Passover Lamb. God had instituted in His law that the passover lamb must be perfect. No bones could be broken;

Exodus 12:46

It must be eaten inside one house. You are not to take any of the meat outside

the house, and you may not break any of the bones.

Numbers 9:12

they may not leave any of it until morning or break any of its bones. They must observe the Passover according to all its statutes.

Psalms 34:20

He protects all his bones; not one of them will be broken.

If those soldiers had shattered Jesus leg bones, you could throw your Bibles away. If they had inadvertently broken a rib bone with the spear, you could throw your Bibles away. If a bone of His hands or His feet had been broken when they drove the nails through His flesh into the cross, you could throw your Bibles away. God set the rules in place 1500 years earlier and not a bone of His passover Lamb was broken. Providence.

But He *was* pierced through.

Zechariah 12:10

Then I will pour out on the house of David and on the people of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and prayer, and they will look on Me, the One they have pierced. They will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

Psalm 22 mysteriously pictures the crucifixion 1000 years before it happened when David says;

Psalm 22:16,17 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet...

That piercing by that soldier remains for eternity, even in the resurrected body of the dead Jesus. After the resurrection, what does He say to doubting Thomas?

Jn. 20:27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my

hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

Thomas, I was very dead. But Thomas, put your finger through the holes in my hands and thrust your hand into the hole that was pierced in my side. The person who was dead, is now alive.

His wounds will remain. Those Israelites who remain at His second coming will look on Him whom they had pierced. They will see with their eyes those wounds inflicted upon Him and they will mourn for their Messiah, finally, as for an only son. That day is yet future. But those wounds remain by the providence of God. Prophecy fulfilled, and prophecy yet future which will be fulfilled with those eternal wounds yet visible for the Glory of the Son of God.

Is this all a romantic myth? Listen again to John; *35 And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.*

It's not a myth. Reliable witnesses gazed at the dead Jesus and witnessed the soldiers not breaking His legs, because He was already dead, and then thrusting the spear in so that water and blood gushed out. John says, take my word for it. I saw it. I watched it. I was there. He was dead.

Now we switch to Mark's gospel, Mark's account; Mark the amanuensis of Peter. More eye witnesses telling the truth, recounting the providential acts of God surrounding the death of Jesus. More proof of His very real death.

Mk. 15:42 And when evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 And Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. 45 And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.

Joseph. A closet christian. A member of the Sanhedrin council. A prominent jew, but a secret believer. He's kept his mouth shut about Jesus. God has His people in places we don't even know about. Sometimes no one knows you're a christian until it's God's purpose to reveal it.

But Joseph's moment has come in the providence of God. What happens to criminals when they come down from their crosses. They get tossed in the city dump. Like the dead animal pit. No dignity in burial for anyone who dies on a tree. God says cursed is anyone who dies upon a tree. Throw them in the dump. And that's what would have happened to Jesus, if not for the intervention of God.

God has a man, a silent believer, an important man in the jewish nation, a rich man, well respected, who has been quiet about Jesus but now he can be quiet no longer. Love compels him to not allow Jesus to be thrown out with the garbage on the heap. He must put silence aside and act.

A reasonable request it seems to Pilate. Why not. But first Pilate needs to ascertain whether or not Jesus is in fact dead. Perhaps it's only a short time since the soldiers were sent. Word hasn't come back yet of their actual death's.

So Pilate summons the centurion, the guy in charge of the soldier detail sent to shatter the legs and finish the job. Is Jesus in fact dead. And the centurion says, yes, He is in fact, dead. More eye witnesses. Witness from the very person given the detail to ensure the deaths in short order to clean up the mess. Yes, Jesus IS dead. More witnesses. Besides those who gaze from a distance, we have the witness of a soldier, a leader of a hundred, and Pilate. Pilate believes the centurion. He is more than a trustworthy source.

Pilate releases the body to Joseph. We can imagine between the lines. It's a close distance to the execution grounds. Does the centurion go with Joseph to tell the soldiers, these two go to the dump, but this one, Jesus, is released to this man, Joseph by order of Pilate. No question at this point about death.

But God isn't finished with His proof of death and burial yet. We'll pick up the story of Joseph in Luke, our passage for this morning;

50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man 51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; 52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. 54 It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

Isaiah 53:9 must have confused everyone who read it until this day. It must have seemed obscure.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

How can someone assigned a grave with the wicked end up in a rich man's grave? What does that even mean? And yet here's Jesus, the soldiers are getting ready to take His dead body to the dump with the other 2 criminals, and a rich man shows up, with permission from the governor, and takes Jesus and prepares Him for a dignified burial only the rich would have.

John tells us another closet christian shows up to help.

Jn. 19:38 And after these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. He came therefore, and took away His body. 39 And Nicodemus came also, who had first come to Him by night; bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. 40 And so they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. 41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid. 42 Therefore on account of the Jewish day of

preparation, because the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Joseph provided the unused hewn tomb and the burial cloth. Nicodemus who we first met, at night, questioning Jesus in John 3, who we haven't seen again since then, we didn't know by that chapter whether he was a believer or not, he turns up with a large quantity of myrrh and aloes.

The jews would wrap those substances up in the cloth, bound like a mummy, and the myrrh and aloes would keep the odor of deterioration away for a time. It was a custom of dignity and love.

Matthew tells us;

Mt. 26:59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. 61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

Jesus is placed in the tomb, with the spices, and a large stone was rolled against the entrance, closing the tomb.

In 1971 I was in Israel and witnessed a tomb, no one can prove if it's THE tomb, but it's a hewn out tomb in the garden, and you can see to this day a channel by the entrance in which a good sized wheel shaped stone, something like a mill stone, could roll in that channel and seal the tomb. Very interesting.

The women from Galilee, the same ones who gazed on in horror during the death of Jesus have watched the events. They want to know which tomb He is in. They want to prepare spices in honor of Jesus and they need to know which tomb it is that they would put those in.

Luke tells us:

55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes.

And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

It's as if, they wanted to do the spices for the body of Jesus, out of love and honor, and they simply ran out of time. Sundown has come. The Sabbath has begun. They will have to wait until after the Sabbath. But they note carefully which tomb the dead body of Jesus has been placed into.

Providence uses those who love Jesus to accomplish the proof of His death. People like Joseph and Nicodemus, and these women who loved Him. And providence uses neutral people, like the soldiers who are simply carrying out their detail, breaking the legs of the living men and not breaking Jesus legs because He was already dead. They don't have a horse in that race. Just carrying out orders. And providence uses wicked men with wicked intent, to prove without a shadow of a doubt, the death and resurrection of Jesus. God controls it all.

Mt. 27:62 Now on the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, 63 and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' 64 "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." 66 And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

Hypocrites. When they were trying to find something to accuse Him of before Pilate, they said He said He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in 3 days. To Pilate they twist the story to meet that need. He's a terrorist who claimed He would destroy our temple.

But now the same statement is twisted differently. He said He would rise on the 3rd day. Wait a minute!! Which one is it you hypocrites?? Same statement twisted two different ways to suit their agenda. But ultimately, they understood perfectly that He meant resurrection from the dead when He said

that.

That means when they were making the first accusation before Pilate about destruction of property they were bald faced liars! They knew what He had said.

The final scene in the proof of the real death and burial of Jesus, brought to us by wicked men with evil intent. The tomb is sealed. I don't know what they used. Hot wax? It's like those doors out where I used to work that have a tin or plastic seal that seals them closed and the time and person who put the seal in place is logged and noted. The door can't be opened without breaking the seal.

The tomb is sealed and a Roman guard is put in place. No one will mess with a roman guard. Those guys mean business. If they fail to guard what they've been ordered to guard, their lives can be the cost. The tomb is sealed and the guard's are motivated.

God's final providence to say that anyone who would later claim that Jesus didn't die, or the disciples robbed His body out of the tomb, is not only laughable, it's intentionally wicked to believe anything of the sort because of all of God's providential proofs concerning the death and burial of His Son Jesus the Christ.

God arranged history, He provided witnesses and He did it in a way that for anyone to claim the death and resurrection of Jesus is phony, it requires a level of intentional wickedness to claim that all of these providences of God did not in fact happen. You have to be very wicked to get any where near something like all of the weird and wicked explanations to say Jesus did not die and rise again.

God used miracles during the punishment phase of Jesus cross to attest to the reality of His own Son suffering for sins not His own, they were my sins and your sins. Great miracles accompanied those moments. Earthquakes and darkness, the curtain ripped open in the temple, bodies of the saints released

from tombs, the cries of Jesus at the finish, the sovereign control over the moment it was finished and He died. Remarkable and dramatic miracles.

After His death, God uses providence and people, good, neutral and wicked to combine events that forever prove His death and His resurrection. The astonishing miracle of the orchestration of the providence of a sovereign God over every detail to prove the actual death and burial of His Son which also completed perfectly prophecies that were centuries old.

Do you believe this morning?