**God Rules**

Jn. 5:17

Introduction:

1. Is God really concerned about me? Is He really active in my life? How does God act today? Does he? Perhaps he has wound the world up and gone off and left it. Perhaps he is an absentee God. Perhaps he is not there at all.

2. In recent years scientific explanation has challenged our concept of God acting. Meteorology explains weather patterns. Biology explains physical development. Geology explains earth’s movements. Such have resulted in God’s absence.

3. If God acted directly in your life like he did John the Baptist’s by speaking to you with you with a voice from heaven, or if God acted in your life to perform a miracle like he did on Lazarus when he was raised from the dead, you would probably have little question about whether God acts today. But given the long period of history, only a relatively few people have ever experienced such acts of God. Most likely you are not one of them.

4. For most of us our lives have been relatively uneventful when compared with those who have experienced God’s miraculous operation.

5. We may have experienced some things such as meeting just the right person to marry, finding ourselves in a particular congregation who can meet our needs well, and we wonder, “Did God provide this person, this congregation to meet my needs? Did he deliberately move in my life in such a way as to create this situation? The answer is often indefinite because concrete and direct information is unavailable. Perhaps it happened by chance. Perhaps God created the situation.

6. One thing we do know for sure and that is that God has communicated to us in the Bible. It is His word. By looking into it we can gain insight into how God is acting today.

7. God’s activity in the world is known as his providence. Providence concerns God’s support, care, and supervision of all the creation from the moment of the first creation to eternity.

8. In this lesson we will

 a. Define providence.

 b. Distinguish between general providence and special providence.

 c. Discuss these concepts and give examples.

9. Sometimes we think of God as far away, ethereal, not really involved. I hope that one of the things that you can get from this lesson is that God not only acts, but he is acting in your life, right now, that he is not far away, but he is real and that he is here.

Discussion:

I. Providence defined.

 A. The word “providence” is from the Latin *providentia,* the verb form of which means “to

 see ahead.” It carries the idea of seeing ahead so as to make plans and preparations for

 what is coming. If you have a farm loan coming due you must look ahead and make

 provision for payment. You must act so as to provide the required amount.

 B. The Greek term *pronoeo*, means “to perceive in advance” so as to make provision for.

 C. The English word “providence” only occurs in Acts 24:2 in Tertullus’ address to Felix.

 He said, “By your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation. . . .”

 The English term never occurs in regard to God’s provision and care. This is

 surprising in light of the fact that the concept permeates all of Scripture.

 D. “Providence” as we are using it, refers to God’s care and help, his providing for his

 creation.

 1. ZPEB defines providence as “God’s activity through His unlimited power and

 knowledge to fulfill His purpose for the whole creation, including man.”

 2. Jack Cottrell, **God the Ruler**, gives a more complete definition.

 “God’s providence is his continuous activity of preserving and governing the

 whole creation by his wisdom and goodness and power, for the fulfillment of his

 eternal purpose and for the glory of his name.” Distinguishes four elements

 a. Kind of activity--preserving and governing.

 b. Scope--universal.

 c. Means--infinite wisdom, goodness and power.

 d. Purpose--fulfillment of his plan to glorify himself.

II. God works in preserving the universe in existence and in directing its natural processes according to natural laws. This is known as General Providence.

 A. All the things that are created must have God’s continual input of power in order for

 them to continue to exist.

 1. Col. 1:17: “In Him all things hold together.”

 2. Heb. 1:3: “He upholds all things by the word of His power.”

 3. God preserves in existence all he has created (Psa. 148:1-6).

 4. We owe our very existence at this moment to God (Acts 17:28)

 5. “O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast” (Psa. 36:6).

 6. We are **dependent** upon a faithful God.

 B. God controls all the natural processes in the universe.

 1. While science may analyze what happens, God is the force behind its happening.

 To explain nature does not explain the power behind it. A botanist may explain

 the various combinations of seed, light, water and minerals that produce a corn

 plant, but he cannot explain the mystery of why these combinations produce a

 corn stalk. He can explain what happens, but not why it happens (Psa.

 104:14-15).

 2. Note passages highlighted in Job 38 and 39.

 3. God is concerned with the life of sparrows (Mt. 10:29). Feeds them (Mt. 6:26).

 4. God controls evaporation (Psa. 135:6-7; Job 36:27-28). The clouds (Job.

 37:11-12).

 5. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mt. 5:45).

 C. Observations.

 1. God operates through natural laws that he has designed to accomplish his will for

 his creation. Because we can observe these laws in operation does not mean that

 God is inoperative or does not exist.

 2. God’s rulership in these matters does not mean that other forces are never

 involved.

 a. Satan was involved in Job’s temptation (1:12; chapters 1 and 2). But God

 was in ultimate control. Cf. also Gen. 2:17-19.

 b. Human free will is also operative.

 3. God’s rulership over nature might be compared to a gardener who plants, waters,

 weeds, etc. but basically let’s nature take its course. Yet he guides that course to

 accomplish his purposes. God has given basic laws of nature, but guides them,

 cares for them, and tends to them and he is the **cause** of those natural processes.

 4. God is intimate with his creation, including you. Air, food, bodily processes.

 5. Luck and pure chance is ruled out. God is in control.

 6. Brings new meaning to 578 “This Is My Father’s World.”

III. God also acts directly in the world. Sometimes he acts to set aside natural laws altogether.

When he does this a miracle occurs. Generally, however, God intervenes by acting upon natural laws and influencing human decisions so as to cause results that would not have occurred without the intervention but which are still within the possibilities of natural law and which do not violate free will. Such actions are called special providence.

 A. What I would like to do under this heading is to look at one grand example of God’s

 special providence, the scheme of redemption. Illustrate how God accomplished his

 will with particular instances of his accomplishment of his plan with two lesser

 examples, the preservation of Israel by Joseph, the conversion of the Ethopian by

 Philip.

 B. Acts 2:23 says that Jesus was delivered up by the predetermined plan and

 foreknowledge of God. Acts 4:28 indicates that his death happened as a result of what

 God’s hand and purpose predestined to occur.

 1. These passages indicate that the death of Jesus was part of a plan that God brought

 about.

 2. We can go back in Scripture and see this plan gradually unfolding.

 a. It was prophesied that from Abraham’s seed all the nations of the earth would

 be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

 b. Gal. 3:16ff indicates that Christ was that seed.

 c. Thus, the preservation of the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, was

 accomplished in order that God might produce the Christ.

 C. Gen. 37-50 tells the account of Joseph.

 1. Sold by his brothers into slavery.

 2. In Egypt he prospered and ultimately preserved the nation of Israel, the

 descendants of Abraham.

 3. Note his assessment of God’s involvement in his experiences (Gen. 45:5, 7-11).

 He did not understand it before.

 4. The descendants of Abraham were provided for by God.

 5. God used Joseph’s brothers.

 6. God used Ismaelite tradesmen.

 7. God used Pharaoh.

 8. God used the land of Egypt.

 9. Observations.

 a. Did not overrule anyone’s free well decision.

 b. Used natural law. Agricultural and weather conditions of Egypt and

 Canaan. Even used natural psychological law. Brothers jealousy and

 hatred.

 c. Used miracles to reveal dreams.

 d. God acted to direct the affairs of his creation to accomplish his objectives

 sometimes outside the direct awareness of those he was using.

 e. God did it because he was concerned about the spiritual condition of an

 Ethiopian who lived thousands of years after Joseph. In Abraham’s seed

 **all nations** shall be blessed. God made provision for this Ethiopian to be

 saved.

 D. Acts 8:25ff describes the experiences of this Ethiopian.

 1. Read the text.

 a. God provided Philip by miraculous intervention (v. 26). Philip had

 approximately a two day journey to arrive at the place where the Ethiopian

 was.

 b. Natural occurrence for the Ethiopian to have been to worship. But not

 everyone had. Not everyone was journeying from Jerusalem. Not

 everyone was reading from Isa. 53.

 c. Natural occurrence for an Ethiopian to be taught Christ by Philip and Isa.

 53.

 d. No indication that Ethiopian knew of angel speaking to Philip.

 2. God preserved the nation of Israel in order to save this Ethiopian.

 3. Jesus came through Abraham.

 4. Philip preached Jesus to this Ethiopian.

 5. Jesus died for this Ethiopian.

 6. The Ethiopian’s rejoicing came about as a result of what Joseph did. Without

 God’s providing for the nation through Joseph, Jesus would not have been

 produced. If God had not provided Jesus, the Ethiopian could not have been

 saved.

 E. God has provided for Wayne Galloway, and you..

 1. God acted providentially through Joseph to provide for me, and you.

 2. God preserved the national of Israel in order to save me, and you.

 3. God provided the word written in my language so that I can read and

 understand.

 4. God provided a messenger to communicate Jesus Christ to me.

 5. God has brought us together today by his divine providence.

 6. God provided Jesus for you.

Conclusion:

1. God is acting right now in your behalf.

2. God is providing you rain, fruitful season, air to breathe.

3. God is providing for you that you might be saved.

4. God is, and God is active.