

Life's Ultimate Questions
Is God Watching over Me?
Jeremiah 1:11-19

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Text Introduction: We are in a series of messages in the book of Jeremiah. We are calling this series Life's Ultimate Questions. The first question was "What is the purpose of my life?" Last time we considered a question from chapter 2, "Is there any hope for my country?" Today, we return to chapter 1 and pick up the second half of Jeremiah's call. Our question of the day is "Is God watching over Me?" Here is the text:

Text: Then the word of the LORD came to me, asking, "What do you see, Jeremiah?"

I replied, "I see a branch of an almond tree."

¹² The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I watch over My word to accomplish it." ¹³ Again the word of the LORD came to me inquiring, "What do you see?"

And I replied, "I see a boiling pot, its lip tilted from the north to the south."

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to me, "Disaster will be poured out from the north on all who live in the land.

¹⁵ Indeed, I am about to summon all the clans and kingdoms of the north."

This is the LORD's declaration.

They will come, and each king will set up his throne
at the entrance to Jerusalem's gates.
They will attack all her surrounding walls
and all the other cities of Judah.

¹⁶ "I will pronounce My judgments against them for all the evil they did when they abandoned Me to burn incense to other gods and to worship the works of their own hands.

¹⁷ "Now, get ready. Stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not be intimidated by them or I will cause you to cower before them. ¹⁸ Today, I am the One who has made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the population. ¹⁹ They will fight against you but never prevail over you, since I am with you to rescue you."

This is the LORD's declaration.

Introduction: When we ask the question “Is God watching over me?” we are asking a question related to the providence of God. The providence of God is not easy to understand, so let me first give you a definition and then tell you a story. Then, we will return to the text here in Jeremiah.

Definition of the Providence of God: God working behind the scenes in my life according to His own methods and in His own time to bring about God-sized and God-ordained results in my life.

I think one of the greatest stories of God’s providence is the story of Queen Esther. The book of Esther contains the story of God’s purposeful and providential intervention in the lives of the Jews who were living under Persian domination.

Chapter 1

- A wicked king—Ahasuerus
- An ungodly party—180 days just to show off his vast wealth
- An ungodly request—When all the guests are good and drunk, he calls for his wife to come to the party. He wanted to show her off because she was beautiful.
- A bold refusal—Queen Vashti refused to come. She recognized the “time bomb” to which she was being asked to come.
- An Ungodly rule—Angered by her refusal and because the other men are afraid that other wives will hear of this refusal, the King is convinced to issue a decree that she is banished and she is no longer queen.

Chapter 2

- An Elaborate Beauty Pageant—of all the most beautiful women of the kingdom
- A godly man (Mordecai) and his beautiful niece (Esther) are introduced to the story.
- Esther becomes queen—Esther wins the beauty pageant. Esther is a Jew.
- Mordecai saves the King—Meanwhile Mordecai goes to the King’s Gate every day. Mordecai overheard the plans of a scheme to kill the king. Relaying this news to Esther, Mordecai’s name is recorded for saving the king.

Chapter 3

- Haman’s Plot-- Suddenly, another character, Haman, arrives on the scene as the king’s “right-hand-man.” Angered at Mordecai’s refusal to bow in his presence, Haman devises a plan to exterminate the Jews. He is so angry at Mordecai that he is going to kill everyone of the same race as Mordecai. He gets the king to sign off on his plan.

Chapter 4—Mordecai pleads for Esther to get involved and Esther plans to intercede. Mordecai, learning of this plot convinces Esther that perhaps she has attained such a position as queen to bring salvation to her people, the Jews.

Chapter 5—Esther holds a series of banquets while Haman’s jealousy continues to boil. At this point in the story two meetings with the king are planned—one requested by Esther and the other by Haman. Esther’s request is for the king to intervene for the Jews; Haman’s request is for Mordecai’s life.

Chapter 6—A King who cannot sleep!

The Rest of the Story-- On the night before this meeting, the king cannot sleep and reads from the records of the king. The reading reminds the king of Mordecai's intervention to save his life and wonders what has been done to honor him. The result of the king not sleeping ultimately results in several things. First, Mordecai is finally honored (by Haman of all people). Second, upon hearing of the plan to exterminate the Jews, the king orders the hanging of Haman on the gallows he had made for Mordecai. Third, the king gives Mordecai Haman's job. Most importantly, the fourth result is the salvation of the Jews. Whereas the king could not reverse his earlier decree, he allowed the Jews to defend themselves. In defending themselves, they destroyed their enemies. As a result of their victory, the Jews inaugurated a day of celebration to remind themselves of this victory.

I remind you of the Definition of the Providence of God: God working behind the scenes in my life according to His own methods and in His own time to bring about God-sized and God-ordained results in my life.

This is what God was doing in Esther's life. This is what God is doing in your life. This is what God was doing in Jeremiah's life. Two Sundays ago, we said that God's purpose for Jeremiah's life was consistent with who he was and also consistent with God's purposes for the kingdom. In the text today, we see how God initially confirmed that calling in a couple of visions. The interpretation of the visions is central to how we make application to this text for our own lives.

Explanation of two visions

1. The Branch of an almond tree—God first showed Jeremiah the branch of an almond tree. Then, he says to Jeremiah, "I am watching over my word to accomplish it." Those words seem a little arbitrary to us, but they would not have been to Jeremiah. Several things are happening with this vision. First, there is a play on words going on here. The Hebrew word for almond tree is *shaqed*; the Hebrew word for "watching" is *shoqed*. In addition, the almond tree was the first to bud so some referred to it as the watching tree or the awakening tree. The tree was watching for spring to arrive. All of Spring was awakened at the bud of the almond tree. In addition, almond trees were most plentiful. These trees would be frequent reminders to Jeremiah that God was watching over His Word.
2. The Boiling Pot—The boiling pot was a very specific reference to the invasion that would be coming from the North. God was revealing to Jeremiah that He was in control of even the invasion. Some people would begin to doubt the coming Army, but Jeremiah through this vision would have the constant reminder that the Northern invasion would come.

Why should we care about the providence of God? Well, if your life is like my life, you have a lot of loose ends in your life. You believe you know the will of God for your life, but you are not there yet. Sometimes you wonder if you will ever get there. Then, there is the silence of God. You sometimes begin to wonder if God is really at work. Instead of the glorious end, we are stuck somewhere in the middle. This is often the place where we might even begin to doubt the providence of God. There would be these kinds of time for Jeremiah.

So, God gave Jeremiah two reminders as he began his ministry—reminders that offer a conclusion that is paramount to the providence of God.

Conclusion of the Visions: God is in Control!

6 Benefits of Confidence in the Providence of God

1. Answers the questions of the potential of my life. What is the potential of your life? God is behind the scenes working according to His own methods and His own timing to bring about God-sized and God-ordained results!
2. Affirms the certainty of God's judgment against sin. Though sometimes it appears that evil is winning, it is not!
3. Awakens me to the power and presence of God in my life. His Word will be fulfilled!
4. Eliminates the excuses of my life. It's not just up to me!
5. Assures me in the face of enemies. There will be occasions where you don't see progress because of obstacles and enemies, but in the end, God wins!
6. Activates me to what God has called me to do. Lest we misunderstand the providence of God as it relates to our lives individually, there comes a time for us to act. This is discovered in verses 17-19. Rightly understanding the providence of God does not lead us to inactivity. The providence of God does not say, "Do nothing and it all works out!" Instead, confidence in the providence of God gives us courage to keep on trusting and keep doing what God has called us to do.

It's what Esther did! When Mordecai first asked Esther to intervene and speak to the king about the plot to exterminate the Jews, Esther sent word of a reminder of the law that insisted that no one could approach the king (even the queen) without his invitation. The penalty was death. Esther even gave mention to the fact that she had not been summoned for 30 days. Mordecai said back to her, "Don't think that you will escape the same fate as every other Jew." Then comes those familiar lines from the story, "Who knows, perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Then comes those familiar lines from Esther—"Then I will go to the king, even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish!"

God is watching over you. He is watching over His Word. One of the things that God want to accomplish by His providence is your salvation. So, in His providence, He sent Jesus into this world, to die, so that all you would believe in Him would have eternal life. Doubt that? Don't! Here is a great truth from the Apostle Paul: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6) Want another one? "If you confess with you mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) "For everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." (Romans 10:12)