

THE INTERPRETATION OF PROVIDENCE IN HISTORY – (PART B)

WEEK 6

October 11 – October 17

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

“And in the morning, ‘There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?”

Matthew 16:3

BOOK READING

Roberts, pp. 39 (Providence and History)-47

Quotation for Meditation

“The way we interpret providence will determine the way we evaluate history, especially church history” (p. 39).

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Oct 11	1 Ki 14	Col 1	Eze 44	Ps 97, 98
Oct 12	1 Ki 15	Col 2	Eze 45	Ps 99-101
Oct 13	1 Ki 16	Col 3	Eze 46	Ps 102
Oct 14	1 Ki 17	Col 4	Eze 47	Ps 103
Oct 15	1 Ki 18	1 Thes 1	Eze 48	Ps 104
Oct 16	1 Ki 19	1 Thes 2	Dan 1	Ps 105
Oct 17	1 Ki 20	1 Thes 3	Dan 2	Ps 106

PERSONAL REFLECTION

TIGHT PLACES – LESSON FROM CHURCH HISTORY

DAVID ROGERS

Thomas Bilney, a lesser known character in church history, has an incredible story of faith in a tight place. He was a preacher of the gospel during the early sixteenth century. After being imprisoned for his beliefs, he gave into the pressure to recant his faith. After recanting he fell into a state of depression. After struggling for two years he confessed that he could not deny his Lord anymore. He recanted his recantation and was then sentenced to death by the infamous method of being burned at the stake. The night before his martyrdom, Bilney decided to “test the flame.” He placed his little finger over the open flame of his one lone candle and held the finger there until the tip burned off. He knew that if the Lord could sustain him through, then He would sustain him at the stake. The verse he quoted that night and marked in his Bible was Isaiah 43:2, *“When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you”*. Bilney became a beacon to following generations of how God provides grace in a tight place.

My personal “tight places” in life have not taken me to such depths as what Thomas Bilney experienced, but I am confident that God is a trustworthy God who will sustain, shelter, provide, and literally carry me and my family through all of life’s tight places. As finite beings who have rebelled against God, our flesh seeks to be our savior and the answer to all of our problems. I am analytical by nature. My job at BMW is to analyze and solve problems. I think it is a natural and proper characteristic for men to be a problem solver, even though we may not be asked. This logical skillset, while helpful for some problems in life, does not help solve the types of problems that we find ourselves in when we are in tight places. God is not expecting us to pull ourselves up by our own “boot straps”. He is looking for us to submit some aspect of our lives to Him and trust Him for the outcome. There are many examples in the Bible that show God’s intent in this area. In Judges we find Gideon and the three hundred soldiers. God did not expect Gideon to win in his own strength. Abraham and his servants rescuing Lot and his family is another example of combating against the odds. Hezekiah trusted in the Lord during his sickness. Paul believed the assurance from God when

the ship was trapped in a storm of hurricane proportions. All of these are tight places. All of these situations were not the result of bad choices made by the person involved. Each episode was orchestrated by God to teach the one involved a lesson in trusting God. And God has chosen these stories and others to instruct us in how to trust God in tight places.

There are different types of tight places that we will all go through in life. I categorize tight places as either physical or spiritual. The physical tight places are such things as illness, financial reversals, and relational tensions. We are all familiar with these difficulties. We tend to understand these as part of life in a sin cursed world. The spiritual tight places are usually represented by the categories of persecution and temptation. Because we live in a country which embraces certain freedoms, true persecution seems so minimum. But God's Word still says that those who "will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." II Tim. 3:12 Temptation is a tight place that we often overlook. We think we can overcome temptations in our own strength. As men we must not think that we can in some way overcome the spiritual tight places on our own. The battle against temptation is spiritual, and the weapons are not physical.

Throughout life I have been in different types of tight places: exams for school, job hunt, bills to pay, relational difficulties, and the list goes on. Of course, tight places are different for everyone, and each of us when we are in our tight places feel helpless. Often when we glance back at previous trials, we laugh at ourselves wondering why we thought those experiences were a tight place when we compare it to the more recent tight places in our lives. Our growth in faith allows us to travel up tougher, more rugged terrain. As we learn to trust God more, the challenges become more difficult in order to strengthen our faith. *"Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* James 1:3-4 A runner never runs a marathon in his first race. He has to run the 5K, then work up to a marathon. In like manner, God does not make us run a marathon of trials at the beginning of our walk of faith. He is gracious. *"For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust."* Psalm 103:14 He builds our endurance over time.

We can draw courage from the history of the church or from the great narratives of heroes in God's Word. We can find strength in recognizing the sources of our tight places. But in the end, we must personally grow in our own walk with the Lord. My encouragement for each of you

is to be in the Word. We must memorize verses that help us remember God's will for us in trials. I draw great help and encouragement from James 1. It has taken me a while, but I have never benefited from a passage the way I have benefited from memorizing James 1. Also, sing (or hum quietly to yourself) songs and Psalms that express patience in trials. One of my favorite songs for this is, "What God Ordains is Always Good". Whatever we do, the goal must be one that points us to Christ.

"What God ordains is always good: His will is just and holy.

As He directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly.

My God indeed in every need knows well how He will shield me;
To Him, then, I will yield me."