Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How are you coping with lockdown? How would you react if you got a phone call from the ministry of health later today saying that you have been in contact with someone who has Covid? Are you reading Facebooks post about masks and 5G and vaccines and herd immunity? Are you busy blaming the government or defending the government? Are you worried about losing your job? Are you concerned for your elderly parents or your relative who has underlying health issues? How are you coping with Covid?

Well, in God’s providence, we come, today, to the topic of God’s providence. And there is no topic more fitting, for this moment, than God’s providence.

And for those of you who have not heard the word providence before, you will recognize that it has the word ‘provide’ in it, so you might think that God’s providence is about God providing. And that is correct, as we shall see. But the word ‘providence’ actually has Latin origins. ‘Pro’ means ‘before’ and ‘video’ (or more accurately ‘wideo’) means ‘to see.’ So Providence is literally about God’s ability ‘to see beforehand.’ And we will explore this in more detail within the sermon.

But as I said, there is no topic more fitting for this moment than the providence of God. If we know what the providence of God is all about, we will be respond in the right way to lockdown or whatever else we may encounter in life.

And our text in connection with the providence of the Lord is Psalm 147. It is one of what are known as the **Hallelujah Psalms** –146-150. And they are called that is because each of these Psalms, in the Hebrew language, begins with the word ‘Hallelujah.’ And in English, Hallelujah means ‘praise the Lord.’ And so, Psalm 146 begins with “*I will praise the Lord*” and then all God’s people are invited to praise the Lord. Psalm 148 says that the LORD must be praised *everywhere*, and Psalm 149 that He must be praised *with a new song*, and Psalm 150 that He is to be praised *by everyone* and *everything*. But the focus of Psalm 147 is **Reasons why the Lord should be praised**. And if you are familiar with what certain numbers in the Bible symbolize, how many reasons do you think this Psalm might give us for why the Lord should be praised? What number symbolizes perfection/completeness? That’s right – Seven!

So Psalm 147 gives us **seven reasons to praise the Lord**. And the seven reasons are **seven examples of providence**. So we will work our way through these seven examples and then we will conclude, very briefly, with **three attitudes of praise**.

Now, before we get into the seven examples of providence, look at verse 5, which really lays out the foundation for providence: “*Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure*.”

If someone in your family had to represent your family in a fight, who would you pick? Would it be the weakest person? The new baby, perhaps? Of course not. It would be the strongest or most powerful member of your family. And if someone in your family had to represent your family in a quiz, who would you pick? Surely it would be whoever is the most knowledgeable person in the family. Well, God is “*abundant in power*” and “*His understanding is beyond measure*.”

Earlier in the service we read **Hebrews 1:3**; it says this about the Lord Jesus: “*He upholds the universe by the word of His power*.” That is power! **Psalm 139:4** says, “*Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether*.” That is knowledge!

So God is all powerful and He understands *everything*; there is not a single molecule or event in all of creation that stands apart from His sovereign control and knowledge. This is the foundation for the doctrine of providence; this is why God can and does guide and govern all things, and why He is worthy of our trust.

So let’s see how this is laid out in the **seven examples of providence** that this Psalm provides:

* 1. The first is vv2-6 and it is **God’s care for His people**. There we read that the Lord “*builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*.” And in v6, “*The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked to the ground*.” These verses are about when God brought back the people of Israel from exile in Babylon. So times were very tough. They had been in exile and away from the Promised Land for 70 years. The people were discouraged and weak and wounded, and they were surrounded by enemies.
     1. But God rescued them because they were His chosen people; of all the nations on the earth, they were the ones that God loved and lived with and watched over in a special way.
     2. Now, who was the Persian King who wrote the decree that made it possible for the people to return to Jerusalem? King Cyrus. And which prophet asked the king if Jerusalem could be rebuilt? Nehemiah. And he and Zerubbabel led the rebuild program. But what do we read here in this Psalm? It was the Lord who did all this; it was the Lord who was at work through Cyrus and Nehemiah and Zerubbabel.
     3. And even though mighty people and nations with armies opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the ragtag bunch of exiles, who hardly had a weapon between them, were able to complete the work. Why? Because the Lord was on their side and it was His purpose that Jerusalem be rebuilt.
     4. So, fast forward to today. Who are God’s chosen people today? It is not any one nation; it is the church of Jesus Christ; it is all those who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ. They are the ones who God He loves and lives among and watches over in a special way. In **1 Peter 2:9**, the church is called “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession*.” Because of what Jesus did to create the church and because the church will be presented to the Lord Jesus at the end of time, God is building up the church by gathering sinners into it and ‘healing their wounds (forgiving their sins) and watching over them.
     5. And though the church often looks so pathetic, Jesus told us that He will build His church “*and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*.”
     6. So God’s care for the church of Jesus Christ is reason number 1 to praise the Lord!
  2. But the second reason we are given is seen in v4 – God’s **creation power**: “*He determines the number of the stars; He gives to all of them their names*.”
     1. When you and I make something we start with an idea and then a sketch or twelve and then we get our first attempt all wrong and we make it three more times until it is right. But then the next day we look at it again and we wish we had added… or used… But God did not need to plan or sketch the stars; he didn’t need to work out the right number and distances for orbit, etc. He just said, Star, Jupiter, Andromeda galaxy – and they came into being, and in their perfect orbit or station – perfect! It is breathtaking and mind-boggling all at the same time!
     2. So the fact that your God created the universe is the second reason to praise the Lord.
  3. The third reason we are given is in vv8-9 – God’s **care for the animals**: “*He covers the heavens with clouds; He prepares rain for the earth; He makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry*.”
     1. Boys and girls, I am sure you have seen young birds in the nest that are fed by their parents. And young ravens are the same; they point their open beaks up and receive bugs or berries from their parent. So who feeds young ravens? Their parents.
     2. But listen to how Jesus described this in **Luke 12:24**: “*Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them*.” So every time a raven drops a berry or a bug into a young raven’s beak, ultimately it is the God of providence at work. Every bug that makes its way into a raven’s mouth is, ultimately, a gift from the Lord!
     3. And having said this, Jesus then said, “*Of how much more value are you than the birds*!” And He was talking about you – children of your Father in heaven through faith in Jesus Christ! His point? If God provides for ravens, He will provide for you! God knows how many days your life will last. It is already ordained. You can’t make it shorter or longer. But He will provide all that you need everyone of those days!
     4. So God’s care for animals in reason number 3 to praise the Lord.
  4. The fourth reason is laid out in vv 10-11 – God’s **delight in His people**: “*His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love*.”
     1. You know, I once heard about a ‘Christian’ sect who had as a rule that men were not allowed to wear shorts because of v10. They said, If the Lord takes no pleasure in the legs of a man, then they should always be covered up. But I can assure you that that is not what this verse is about. What these verses are saying is that unlike human beings who are impressed by armies and soldiers and athletes, the LORD delights in those who love to worship Him and obey His commandments.
     2. Do you ever pause to ponder that? God is in heaven. He needs nothing from anyone. And He has made this vast universe. But right now He is leaning forward and rubbing His hands with glee because you and me are worshiping Him. Isn’t that incredible! And boys and girls, every time you choose to obey your parents and not answer back, God smiles with pleasure!
     3. So the fact that God really does delight in your worship and obedience is reason number 4 to praise the Lord.
  5. And the fifth reason is laid out in vv13-14 – God’s **Blessing on the Nation**: “*For He strengthens the bars of your gates; He blesses your children within you. He makes peace in your borders; He fills you with the finest of the wheat*.”
     1. And this reason is similar to the first reason, but the focus here is not times of trouble but times of peace and security and well-being. Bars on the gates is a picture of safety and joyful family life and prosperity. So, because God is the God of providence, just as the people of Israel needed God in times of trouble, so they needed God when times were good.
     2. And similarly today: In alert level 3, I am sure you are busy praying to God for continued health and job security and wisdom for our rulers and revival in the land. But last week, in alert level 1, were you busy thanking God for good health and a job and peace in the land, and family or flatmates, and church family? Or could it be that we are quick to pray when it’s tough but not so quick to pray when all is well? It is easy to forget God when life is good, isn’t it. But we should not. So we can confess this as sin to the Lord and know that in Christ there is forgiveness.
     3. So God’s blessing on the nation is reason number 5 to praise the Lord.
  6. The sixth reason is laid out in vv15-18 – God’s **Control of the weather**: “*He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters hoarfrost like ashes. He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word, and melts them; He makes His wind blow and the waters flow*.”
     1. Now, we know a lot about weather these days, don’t we. We know how rain works and we understand high pressure systems and wind patterns and cloud structures. We can even ‘make snow’ on ski fields and gigantic water sprinklers for farms. But, it is drought time here in Auckland and we are limited to 4 minute showers and not allowed to wash the car with the hose. So there is much about the weather that we cannot control.
     2. But every day, this Psalm tells us, God sends snow and rain and hail and Sunshine and wind. And there is no diary or spreadsheet or diagram or calculator to help Him get it all right and to get the right amounts at the right time – He just sends out His command to the earth, and the perfect amount of exquisitely beautiful hexagonal snow-flakes, with no two of them being the same, fall to the ground to accomplish His purposes. It is staggering to contemplate!
     3. So God’s control of the weather is reason number 6 to praise the Lord.
  7. The seventh and last reason is laid out in vv19-20 – God’s **Gives His Word to His People**: “*He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know His rules. Praise the LORD*!”
     1. How did the people of Israel know the Lord? How did they know that He cared for them and that He created the universe? How did they know that He would send Messiah? How did they know how to live and worship? Because they had the Old Testament; they had God’s covenant law and instructions about the sacrifices and ceremonies.
     2. So of all the many blessings that God’s OT people had to praise Him, the greatest was the OT! Later on in Ephesians, Paul says this about the Gentiles: In OT times, “*you were … separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world*.” Because they did not have the OT, Gentiles of OT times had no hope and were without God in the world.
     3. And a NT equivalent of this truth is **2 Timothy 3:15-17**. For there Paul talks about the OT and NT together as the “*sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ*.” Jesus said, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*.” And we only know this from the Bible. So if a person cannot read the Bible or hear the preaching of the gospel, they have no hope of salvation. But Paul continues, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work*.” So how are we equipped for every good work? How can we know what is right and what is wrong, and what pleases the Lord? Answer? Scripture.
     4. So having easy access to the Bible and being able to hear preaching is reason number 7 to praise the Lord.

Well, putting all of this together, what we have seen is that if you have repented of your sins and believed in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, then the God who is abundant in power and whose understanding is beyond measure is your Father in heaven. And:

1. He cares for you in times of trouble,
2. He created the universe,
3. He cares for the animals but cares even more deeply for you,
4. He delights in your worship and obedience,
5. He blesses you with good times,
6. He has control of the weather,
7. And He has given you His Word.

And I said that after considering these seven angles of providence, we would conclude, very briefly, with the **three attitudes of praise**.

And when I said very brief, I meant very brief! For the three attitudes of praise are what we read earlier in question and answer 28:

*How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us? We can be* ***patient*** *when things go against us,* ***thankful*** *when things go well, and for the future we can have good* ***confidence*** *in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.*

So let me ask you again: How are you coping with lockdown2? Will you be patient? And will you be thankful when we return, God willing, to Alert level 1? And are you confident that neither Covid nor anything else can separate you from the love of God?

How comforting it is to know that our lives are secure in the hand of our Father in heaven. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Amen.