

Christian Classic Series

An excerpt from  
*The Fountain of  
Life Opened*



John Flavel (1627–1691)

# The Fountain of Life Opened

By John Flavel

This booklet contains one chapter excerpted from the 42 chapters of  
*The Fountain of Life Opened*, entitled...

“The Kingly Office of Christ as Providentially Executed  
for the Redeemed”

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## The Kingly Office of Christ as Providentially Executed for the Redeemed

*“And hath put all things under His feet,  
and gave Him to be the head  
over all things to the church.”*

— Ephesians 1:22

**T**HE foregoing verses are thankful and humble adoration of the grace of God in bringing the Ephesians to believe in Christ. This effect of His power is compared with that other glorious effect, the raising of Christ Himself from the dead; both are from the same efficient cause. It raised Christ from a low estate, even from the dead, to a high, a very high and glorious state, to be the head both of the world and of the church: the head of the world by way of dominion, the head of the church by way of union and special influence, ruling the world for the good of His people in it. “He gave him to be head over all things to the church.” And here let these four things be seriously regarded:

1. The dignity and authority committed to Christ: “He hath put all things under His feet;” which implies full, ample and absolute dominion in Him, and subjection in them over whom He reigns. This power is delegated to Him by the Father; for besides the essential, native power and dominion over all, which He hath as God (Psa 22:28), there is a dispensed authority which is proper in Him as Mediator, which He received as the reward or fruit of His suffering (Phi 2:8-11).

2. The recipient of this authority is Christ, and Christ primarily and only: He is the first receptacle of all authority and power. Whatever authority any creature is clothed with is but ministerial and derivative. Christ is the only Lord (Jude 4), the fountain of all power.

3. The object of this authority is the whole creation; “all things” are put under His feet: He rules from sea to sea, even to the utmost bounds of God's creation. “Thou hast given Him power over all flesh” (Joh 17:2): all creatures, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, angels, devils, men, winds, seas, all obey Him.

4. And especially notice the end for which He governs and rules the universal empire; it is for “the church,” that is, for the advantage, comfort and salvation of

those for whom He died. He purchased the church; and that He might have the highest security that His blood should not be lost, God the Father has put all things into His hands, to order and dispose all as He pleaseth. Hence, all the affairs of the kingdom of providence are ordered and determined by Jesus Christ, for the special advantage and everlasting good of His redeemed people. "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him" (Joh 17:2). Hence it comes to pass that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

That Jesus Christ providentially controls all the affairs of this world is evident from both Scripture assertion, and from the observations of events.

The first chapter of Ezekiel contains an admirable plan or design of providence. There you see how all the wheels, that is, the motions and revolutions here on earth, are girded by the spirit that is in them. And (v.26), it is all resolved into the supreme cause; there you find one like the Son of man, which is Jesus Christ, sitting upon the throne and giving forth orders for the government of all; and if it were not so, how is it that all events conspire to the fulfillment of His designs; as in Israel's deliverance out of Egypt and other innumerable instances? Certainly if ten men, from different directions, should all meet at one place and about one business without any previous arrangement it would argue that their motions were secretly overruled by some invisible agent. How is it that such marvelous effects are produced in the world by causes apparently so feeble (Amo 5:9; 1Co 1:27)? and that as often the apt and likely means are rendered wholly ineffectual (Psa 33:16)? In a word, if Christ hath no such providential influence, how are His people in all ages preserved in the midst of so many millions of potent and malicious enemies, amongst whom they live as sheep in the midst of wolves (Luk 10:3)? How is it that the bush burns, and yet is not consumed (Exo 3:2)?

But my business, in this discourse, is not to prove that there is a Providence, which none but atheists deny. *I shall show by what acts Jesus Christ administers this kingdom and in what manner; and what use may be made of this subject.*

## **I. Jesus Christ Rules All Providence**

Jesus Christ rules and orders the Kingdom of Providence by supporting, permitting, restraining, limiting, protecting, punishing and rewarding those over whom He reigns providentially.

*1. He supports the world and all creatures in it by His power.*

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (Joh 5:17). "By Him all things consist" (Col 1:17). It is a considerable part of Christ's glory to have a whole world of

creatures owing their being and hourly preservation to Him. He is “given for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth” (Isa 49:8).

*2. He permits and suffers the worst of creation in His dominion to be and act as they do.*

“The deceived and the deceiver are His” (Job 12:16). Even those that fight against Christ and His people receive both power and permission from Him. Say not that it is unbecoming the Most Holy to permit such evils, which He could prevent if He pleased. For as He permits no more than He will overrule to His praise, so that very permission of His is holy and just. Christ's working is not confounded with the creature's. Pure sunbeams are not tainted by the noisome vapors on which they shine. His holiness hath no fellowship with their iniquities; nor are their transgressions at all excused by His permission. “He is the Rock, His work is perfect” but “they have corrupted themselves” (Deu 32:4,5). And yet should He permit sinful creatures to act out all the wickedness in their hearts, there would remain neither peace nor order in the world. Therefore,

*3. He powerfully restrains creatures by the bridle of Providence, from the commission of those things to which their hearts are inclined.*

“The remainder of wrath Thou wilt restrain” (Psa 76:10); allowing just so much as shall serve His holy ends, and no more. And truly this is one of the glorious mysteries of Providence, which amazes the serious and considerate soul; to see the spirit of a creature fully set to do mischief; power enough, as one would think, in his hand to do it, and a door of opportunity standing open for it; and yet the effect wonderfully hindered. The strong propensities of the will are inwardly checked, as in the case of Laban (Gen 31:24); or a diversion is strangely cast in their way, as in the case of Sennacherib (2Ki 19:7, 8), so that their hands cannot perform their enterprises. Julian had two great designs before him: one was to conquer the Persians, the other to root out the Galileans, as he, by way of contempt, called the Christians. But he would begin with the Persians, and then make a sacrifice of all the Christians to his idols. He did so, and perished in the first attempt. Oh the wisdom of divine Providence!

*4. Jesus Christ limits the creatures in their acting, assigning them their boundaries and lines of liberty to which they may go, but beyond which they cannot go.*

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days” (Rev 2:10). Their enemies would have them cast into their graves, but it shall only be into prison; they would have stretched out their hands upon them all; they would have kept them there perpetually; no, it must be but for ten days. Four hundred and thirty years were determined upon the people of God in Egypt;

and then, even in that very night, God brought them forth; for then “the time of the promise drew nigh” (Act 7:17).

*5. The Lord Jesus providentially protects His people amidst a world of enemies and danger.*

It was Christ that appeared unto Moses in the flaming bush, and preserved it from being consumed. The bush signified the people of God in Egypt; the fire flaming in it, exquisite sufferings they there endured; the safety of the bush amidst the flames, the Lord's admirable care and protection of His poor suffering ones. None so tenderly careful as Christ. “As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem” (Isa 31:5); that is, as they fly swiftly towards their nests, crying, when their young ones are in danger, so will the Lord preserve His. They are “preserved in Jesus Christ” (Jude 1), as Noah and his family were in the ark. Hear how a worthy of our own Dr. Owen on “*Indwelling Sin*” expresses himself on this point:

“That we are at peace in our houses, at rest in our beds; that we have any quiet in our enjoyments is from hence alone. Whose person would not be defiled or destroyed; whose habitation would not be ruined; whose blood almost would not be shed, if wicked men had power to perpetrate all their conceived sin? It may be, the ruin of some of us has been conceived a thousand times. To this Providence we owe the preservation of our lives, our families, our estates, our liberties, and whatsoever is dear to us. For may we not say sometimes with the Psalmist, ‘My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword’ (Psa 57:4)? And how is the deliverance of men from such persons contrived? God breaks their teeth in their mouths, even the great teeth of the young lions (Psa 58:6). He keeps this fire from burning: some He cuts off and destroys; some He deprives of the instruments whereby alone they can work; some He prevents from their desired opportunities; the attention of some is diverted to other objects; and oftentimes He causeth them to spend their force upon one another. We may say, therefore, with the Psalmists, ‘O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches’ (Psa 104:24).”

*6. He punishes evil doers, and repays, by His providence, into their own lap, the mischiefs they intend for those that fear Him.*

Pharaoh, Sennacherib, both the Julians, and innumerable more, are the lasting monuments of His righteous retribution. It is true, a sinner may do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged; but oftentimes God hangs up some eminent sinners in chains as spectacles and warnings to others. Many a heavy blow hath Providence given to the enemies of God from which they were never

able to recover. Christ rules, and that with a rod of iron, in the midst of His enemies (Psa 110:2).

*7. And lastly, He rewards the services done to Him and His people.*

Out of this treasure of Providence God often repays those that serve Him, and that with an hundredfold reward now in this life (Matt 19:29). This active, vigilant Providence hath its eye upon all the wants, straits, and troubles of creatures, but especially of His people. What volumes of experience might the people of God write upon this subject! And what a pleasant history it would be to read the strange, constant, wonderful, and unexpected actings of Providence, for those who have committed themselves to His care!

## **II. How Jesus Christ Administers Providence**

We shall next inquire how Jesus Christ administers this providential kingdom. Both angels and men are His instruments: the angels are “ministering spirits” sent forth by Him for the good of them that shall be heirs of salvation (Heb 1:14). Luther tells us they have two offices, *superius canere et inferius vigilare* (“to sing above and watch beneath”). These do many invisible offices of love. They have dear and tender regard and love for the saints. To them, God, as it were, put forth His children to nurse, and they are tenderly careful of them while they live, and bring them home in their arms to their Father when they die. And as angels, so men are the servants of Providence; yes, bad men as well as good. Cyrus, on that account, is called God's servant. They fulfill His will, whilst they are prosecuting their own lusts. “The earth helped the woman” (Rev 12:16). But good men delight to serve Providence; they and the angels are fellow-servants in one house, and to one Master (Rev 19:10). Yea, there is not a creature in heaven, earth or hell, but Jesus Christ can providentially use to serve His ends, and to promote His designs. But whatever the instrument be which Christ uses, of this we may be certain, that His providential working is holy, wise, sovereign, profound, irresistible, harmonious, and for the peculiar good of the saints.

*1. His providential working is holy.*

Though He permits, orders, and overrules many unholy persons and actions, yet He still works like Himself, most holily and purely throughout. “The LORD is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works” (Psa 145:17). It is easier to separate light from a sunbeam, than holiness from the works of God. The best of men cannot escape sin in their most holy actions. But no sin cleaves to God in whatever He doeth.



*2. Christ's providential working is also most wise and judicious.*

“The wheels” are “full of eyes” (Eze 1:18). They are not moved by a blind impetus, but in deep counsel and wisdom. And, indeed, the wisdom of Providence manifests itself principally in the choice of such states for the people of God as shall most effectually promote their eternal happiness. And herein, it goes quite beyond our understanding and comprehension. It makes that medicinal and salutary, which we judge destructive to our comfort and good. Suarez, speaking of the felicity of the other world, says, “Then the blessed shall see in God all things and circumstances pertaining to them, excellently accommodated and attempered”; then shall they see that the crossing of their desires was the saving of their souls; and that otherwise they had perished. The most wise Providence looks beyond us. It eyes the end, and suits all things thereto, and not to our fond desires.

*3. The providence of Christ is most supreme and sovereign.*

“Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). He is Lord of lords, and King of kings (Rev 19:16). The greatest monarchs are but the worms of the earth to Him: they all depend upon Him, “By Me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By Me princes rule and nobles, even all the judges of the earth” (Pro 8:15-16).

*4. Divine Providence is profound and inscrutable.*

The judgments of Christ are a “great deep...and His footsteps are not known” (Psa 36:6; 77:19). There are hard texts in the works as well as in the words of Christ. The wisest heads have been at a loss in interpreting some events (Jer 12:1, 2; Job 21:7). The angels had the hands of a man under their wings (Eze 1:8); that is, they wrought secretly and mysteriously.

*5. Divine Providence is irresistible in its designs and motion.*

All providences are but fulfillings and accomplishments of God's immutable decrees. “He works all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11). Hence the instruments by which God executed His wrath are called “chariots” coming “from between two mountains of brass” (Zec 6:1); that is, “the firm and immutable decrees of God.” When the Jews put Christ to death, they did only what the hand and counsel of God had before determined to be done (Act 4:28). None can oppose or resist Providence. “I will work, and who shall let it?” (Isa 43:13).

*6. The Providences of Christ are harmonious.*

There are secret chains and invisible connections between the works of Christ. We know not how to reconcile promises and providences together, nor yet providences one with another; but certainly they all work together (Rom 8:28) by the influence of the first cause. He doth not do and undo; destroy by one providence what He built by another. But just as all the seasons of the year, the nipping frost

as well as the halcyon days of summer, conspire and conduce to the harvest, so it is in providence.

*7. The providence of Christ in a special and peculiar way is for the good of the saints.*

His providential working is subordinated to His spiritual kingdom. He is “the Savior of all men, specially of them that believe” (1Ti 4:10). Things are so laid and ordered as that their eternal good, shall be promoted and secured by all that Christ does.

*Inference 1.* If so, see then to whom you are indebted for your lives, liberty, comforts, and all that you enjoy in this world. Is it not Christ that orders all for you? He is, indeed, in heaven out of your sight; but though you see Him not, He sees you, and takes care of all your concerns. When one was told of a plot to take away his life, he answered, “If God take no care of me, how do I live? How have I escaped hitherto?” In all thy ways acknowledge him” (Pro 3:6). It is He that hath appointed the state thou art in as most proper for thee. It is Christ that doeth all for you that is done. He looks down from heaven upon all that fear Him; He sees you when you are in danger by temptation, and interposes something; you know not how to hinder it. He sees when you are sad, and orders reviving providences to refresh you. He sees when corruptions prevail, and orders humbling events to purge them. Whatever mercies you have received, all along the way you have gone hitherto, are the orderings of Christ for you. And you should carefully observe how the promises and providences have kept equal pace with one another, and both gone step by step with you until now.

*Inference 2.* Hath God committed the government of the world to Christ, and trusted Him over all? Then do you also leave all your particular concerns in the hands of Christ, and know that the infinite wisdom and love which rules the world manages everything that relates to you? It is in good hands, infinitely better than if it were in your own. I remember when Melanchthon was under some despondency of spirit about the situation of God's people in Germany; Luther chided him thus for it, “Let Philip cease to rule the world.” It is not ours to guide the course of providence, or direct its motions, but to submit quietly to God. Yet how apt are we to regret providences, as if they had no tendency at all to the glory of God, or to our good (Exo 5:22); yea, to limit the Almighty to our way and time! Thus, the “Israelites tempted God...and limited the Holy One” (Psa 78:18, 41). How often also do we, unbelievably, distrust God as though He could never accomplish what we profess to expect and believe!! “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off” (Eze 37:11; also, Gen 18:13, 14; Isa 40:17). There are but few Abrahams among believers “who against hope believed in hope...giving

glory to God” (Rom 4:18, 20). And it is but too common for good men to repine and fret at providences when their wills are crossed. This was the great sin of Jonah.

Brethren, these things ought not to be so. Did you but seriously consider, either the design of these providential dealings, which is to bring about the gracious purposes of God towards you, which was formed before the world was (Eph 1:4); *or* that it is opposing your will to His, as if you could better order affairs; *or* that you have to do herein with a great and dreadful God, in whose hands you are, who may do what He will with you, and all that is yours, without giving you an account of any of His matters (Job 33:13)? I say, if such considerations as these could but have place with you in troubles and temptation, they would quickly mould your hearts into a better and more quiet frame.

Oh that I could but persuade you to resign all to Christ. He is a skillful workman (Pro 8:25-30), and can effect what He pleaseth. It is a good rule, “*Deoperibus Dei non est judicandum, ante quintum actum.*” (“Let God work out all that He intends, but have patience till He hath accomplished His designs, and then find fault with it, if you can.”) “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord” (James 5:11).

*Inference 3.* If Christ be Lord over the providential kingdom, and that for the good of His people, let none that are Christ's henceforth indulge a slavish fear of creatures. “It is a great consolation,” says Grotius on my text, “that Christ hath so great an empire, and that He governs it for the good of His people, as a head consulting the good of the body.” Our Head and Husband is Lord of all the hosts of heaven and earth; no creature can move hand or tongue without Him: the power that any have is given them from above (John 19:11,12). The serious consideration of this truth will make the feeblest spirit cease trembling, and cause it to shout, “For God is the King of all the earth, sing ye praises with understanding” (Psa 47:7). Has He not given you abundant security in many express promises that all shall issue well for you that fear Him? “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28). Verily, “it shall be well with them that fear God,” even “with them that fear before Him” (Ecc 8:12). And suppose He had not, yet the very understanding of our relation to such a King should, in itself, be sufficient security: for He is the universal, supreme, absolute, meek, merciful, victorious, and immortal King. He sits in glory at the Father's right hand, and His enemies are a footstool for Him. His love to His people is unspeakably tender and fervent, and he that touches them “toucheth the apple of His eye” (Zec 2:8). Till this be forgotten the wrath of man is not feared; he that fears a man that shall die forgets the Lord his Maker (Isa 51:12, 13).

*Inference 4.* If the government of the world be in the hands of Christ, then to acknowledge Christ and engage His blessing in all our affairs and business, is the true and ready way to success. If all depends upon His pleasure, surely it is our wisdom to attempt nothing without Him. It is no lost time that is spent in prayer wherein we ask His direction and beg His presence with us; and, rely upon it, that which is not prefaced with prayer will be followed with trouble. How easily can Jesus Christ dash all your designs, and frustrate in a moment all the purposes of your hearts! The Turks will pray five times a day, however urgent soever their business be. Blush, you that enterprise your affairs without God.

*Inference 5.* Lastly, eye Christ in all the events of providence; see His hand in all that befalls you, whether it be evil or good. “The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein” (Psa 111:2). How much good might we get by observation of the good or evil that befalls us throughout our course!

(1) In all the troubles and afflictions that befall you, eye Jesus Christ, and set your heart to the study of four things in affliction:

Study His sovereignty and dominion: these afflictions rise not out of the dust, nor do they befall you casually; but He raises them up and gives them their commission, “Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you” (Jer 18:11). He selects the instrument of your trouble: He makes the rod as afflictive as He pleaseth; He orders the continuance and end of your troubles; and they will not cease to be afflictive to you till Christ say, Leave off, it is enough. The centurion wisely considered this when he argued, “I have soldiers under me, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh” (Luk 7:8); meaning, that as his soldiers were at his command, so diseases were at Christ's, to come and go as He ordered them.

Study the wisdom of Christ in the contrivance of your troubles. His wisdom shines out many ways in them. It is evident in choosing such kinds of trouble for you as are best adapted to purge out the corruption that predominates in you; in the degree of your troubles, suffering them to work to such a height as to reach their end; but no higher lest they overwhelm you.

Study the tenderness and compassion of Christ over His afflicted people. Oh think, If the devil had the mixing of my cup how much more bitter would he make it! There would not be one drop of mercy in it; but here is much mercy mixed with my troubles. There is mercy in this, that it is no worse. Am I afflicted? “It is of the LORD 's mercies that we are not consumed” (Lam 3:22); it might have been hell instead of this chastisement. There is mercy in His supports under it; I might have been left, as many others have been, to sink and perish under my bur-

dens. Mercy, in deliverance out of it; this might have been everlasting darkness, that should never have had a morning. Oh the tenderness of Christ to His afflicted!

Study the love of Christ to thy soul in affliction. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev 3:19). This is the device of love, to recover thee to thy God, and prevent thy ruin. Oh what an advantage would it be thus to study Christ in all the evils that befall you!

(2) Eye and study Christ in all the good you receive from the hand of Providence. View your mercies in all their lovely circumstances.

Eye them in their suitableness: how conveniently Providence hath ordered all things for thee. Thou hast a narrow heart, and a small estate suitable to it; hadst thou more of the world it would be like a large sail to a boat, which would quickly pull thee under the water: thou hast that which is most suitable to thee. Eye the seasonableness of thy mercies, how they are fitted to thy wants. Providence brings forth all its fruits in due season. Eye the peculiar nature of thy mercies. Others have common, thou special ones; others have but a single, thou a double sweetness in thy enjoyments, one natural from the matter of it, another spiritual from the way in which, and end for which it comes. Observe the order in which Providence sends your mercies. See how one is linked strangely to another, and is a door to let in many. Sometimes one mercy is introductive to a thousand. And lastly, observe the constancy of them, “they are new every morning” (Lam 3:23). How assiduously doth God visit thy soul and body! Think with thyself, if there were but a suspension of the care of Christ for one hour, that hour would be our ruin.

Could we thus study the providence of Christ in all the good and evil that befalls us in the world, we should be in every state content (Phi 4:11). Then we should never be stopped, but furthered on our way in all that occurs; then would our experiences swell to great volumes which we might carry to heaven with us; and then should we answer all Christ's ends in every state He brings us into. Do this, and say, Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ. Amen.



***The Fountain of Life Opened*** is one of John Flavel's best-known works, subtitled: *A Display of Christ in His Essential and Mediatorial Glory*. Against the back-drop of the sinful state of man and the effects of Adam's fall, Flavel traces with skillful application the doctrines of: Christ's essential glory, the covenant of redemption, His impeccability, His prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices, and His death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly session. In a letter to a friend, A.W. Pink once wrote, "Glad to see you are acquainted with Flavel's *Fountain of Life*: it is my favorite of his works and I recently read the whole of it to my wife—one chapter each evening."

**John Flavel** (c. 1630-1691) was born at Bromagrove, Worcester in England. He became a Presbyterian minister, serving at Dartmouth, Devonshire, during the latter half of the seventeenth century when Christianity in England tottered between an enforced cold formalism in the state church and the freedom to practice true evangelical faith. Flavel showed unusually keen theological insight coupled with a deep pastoral concern, making his sermons and writings practical and highly prized. Many of his voluminous works have become well-respected, such as *The Fountain of Life Opened* and *Keeping the Heart*. Jonathan Edwards often quoted Flavel's works, and Archibald Alexander, the first professor at Princeton Seminary, said, "To John Flavel I certainly owe more than to any uninspired author." One of his hearers once said, "...that person must have a very soft head or a very hard heart, or both, that could sit under his ministry unaffected."