

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

(Preached at the Bible Conference in Ashland KY, November 1956)

I HAVE been looking to the Lord and praying for Him to reveal to me the message for this hour, and I believe I have found it. I am speaking on “The Sovereignty of God,” and in announcing this subject I realize that it is too big for the speaker! But please turn to Psalm 115, verse 3. ***“But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”***

In the study of the sovereignty of God, I find that there are seven revivals in the Old Testament and the basis of each one was the sovereignty of God. Then we find two revivals recorded in the New Testament, and the basis was the sovereign grace of God. As you study the Word of God carefully and see that revivals were based on God’s sovereignty, you realize that if there was ever a time when we needed to study this subject surely this is the hour. In a day when it looks like the world is about to fall to pieces, the stars blow up, or that possibly the sun or moon will fall out of the sky, and that everything on the earth will end up in one gigantic collision, it’s a good time to study something of the power and sovereignty of our God. And I believe that our text will serve as the basis of study as much as any other verse in the Bible. ***“But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased”*** (Psalm 115:3).

There are three powers in the earth—only one of them can be sovereign. There is God and man and the devil. Certainly if man is sovereign we are one great mess! If Satan is sovereign, then we can never know when he might invade Heaven, turn Heaven into Hell, and the whole future would be a nightmare. It would be difficult for us to contemplate peace in our hearts and to have faith in God, if either man or Satan were sovereign. But I believe that man is not sovereign; I reject the notion that Satan is sovereign in any sense, and I accept the Word of God that our God is absolutely sovereign.

As we look into the Scriptures tonight and think of this overwhelming subject of “The Sovereignty of God,” I must ask three or four questions and in the answers to these questions we will come to see something of the greatness of our God.

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD? Are we able to take up the Word of God in the Old Testament and in the New and find the right conception and understanding on His sovereignty?

1. *Sovereignty of God means that God is Absolute.* God is perfect, God is complete, and there is no insufficiency in God. God is the great self-existent God and He is absolute.

2. *It means that God is on the Throne.* You know man is willing for God to be anywhere except on the throne, but we must remember that God occupies the eternal throne of the universe now. He was on the throne yesterday; He is on the throne today, and He will be on the throne tomorrow. You cannot change an absolute God!

3. *Sovereignty means that God does as He wills!* Whatever God wills to do is right, and remember that God is so wise that it would be wicked and sinful for Him to do otherwise than what He is doing. He does as He pleases and always as He pleases. An earthly king may have authority over his subjects, but he often lacks the full power to bring them into complete subjection—it is not so with our God!

4. When we speak of the sovereignty of God, *we mean that our God does nothing by chance.* There are no accidents with God. Nothing is left to chance because God is moving unhindered in the heavens and the earth.

5. It means that *God is supreme and independent.* God doesn’t ask help of any man or any other creature in order to accomplish what He wills. He is sovereign over the entire universe, according to

the Scripture. In Daniel 4:35, He tells us, “*And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*” There is no other study in the Bible that fills my heart with joy, with peace, with deep relaxation, as to know that God is on the throne! Let come what may in this old sinful world, it is God on the throne that we can worship, trust and serve, knowing that everything will terminate according to the Divine plan.

II. WHY GOD OUGHT TO BE SOVEREIGN. There are many reasons why I believe that God is the One who ought to be and is sovereign. I trust that you will agree as we look at them.

1. God ought to be sovereign because *He is just and holy*. Being just He will always do that which is lawful and right; being holy He will always work from the purest of motives. Give thanks to God that a person of lesser moral character is not sovereign! God is doing right today and God will do that which is right tomorrow, and because He is holy we can trust Him with all that we are and all that we have. And when you come to see the judgments of God in the earth, you can see that all He does is an act of holiness and an act of love. “*God is love,*” and He cannot be otherwise. His pouring out of wrath in the days of the Flood and upon Sodom and Gomorrah was an act of love in the highest sense—love for His holiness, His principles of justice, and love for His elect people.

2. *Because God is omnipotent*, He ought to be Sovereign. Certainly having all power we can trust a holy and just God to execute His sovereignty in the earth. He will do what pleases Him, and being omnipotent none can withstand Him. But, as we stated, God is so wise and so holy that what pleases Him is always the right thing and it would be wicked and sinful for the opposite to be done.

3. The God of the Bible ought to be sovereign *because He is omniscient*. There is not anything He does not know. I take the position that God knows all of the past, everything in the present and all that will happen in the future—He knows all that He will ever know—and the unfolding of future events cannot add any knowledge to God. I believe that from eternity past He knew all about the wicked, and He saw and knew all that He would ever know about His own dear people, the saints of God being saints in His mind from before the foundation of the world when their names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Since God can grow no older, no knowledge can be added to Him. He dwells in one eternal NOW; God is an omniscient God, and since He knows all about my future, I can put my hands in the Hands of God, as it were, and say, “Dear Lord God, take me and lead me every step of the way.” He knows the way; He knows the pitfalls of Satan; He knows all of the mistakes that I will ever make. God is so good and so wise that He has made a special provision for His children. Do you want to know what it is? He takes all of our mistakes, all of our sins, all of our trials, and weaves them into a little garment and lets us wear it as we move on in the service of our God, by His grace and for His glory!

What an Almighty God is our God! He is *omnipotent*; He is *omniscient*. Studying the Bible on the question of the omniscience of God, I found in the book of Exodus where the Lord told Moses that He would drive every fly out of Egypt. I pondered that verse for a minute—God is going to banish every fly out of Egypt, so that there will remain not even one little fly! And there you must see the omnipotence of God—He must have *all power* in order to drive every single little fly out of the country of Egypt. But it dawned on me also that He *must know everything*—how could He know that at least one little fly had not hid itself under a leaf somewhere and was still in Egypt? God had earlier said to Moses, “I AM THE GREAT I AM. I am the God of Eternity; I am Holy; I am Wise; I am the Great God of All Power in Heaven and in earth!” This great God counts the little gnats in the air, the fishes in the sea, and there is absolutely nothing that God does not know. There isn’t anything so comforting to the people of God as to know that God is omniscient, knows all about them. On the other hand, there isn’t anything so tormenting to a wicked man as to know that God knows everything—

there is no skeleton in your closet that God does not know, there is no sin in your life and no idol in your heart but what God knows all about it. You and I are facing a God who is on the throne, who is sovereign, and a God who is omniscient.

4. God is not only omnipotent and omniscient, but *He is omnipresent*. Thank God, He fills all Heaven and He fills all the earth. God is present everywhere—except in one place. Do you know where God’s presence is not? He dwells in all His universe, except He is not present in the heart of a fallen, rebellious sinner! God’s presence is seen in the saints, in the Son of God, in the holy angels, in all the works of His hands, but He does not dwell in the heart of the unregenerate. How terrible is your condition, sinner, and how you do need a God who is omnipresent!

5. Another truth that demands that God be sovereign is that *God is immutable*. There is nothing about Him that could change for the better or the worse. He speaks to us in Malachi 3:6 and says, **“I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”** Then in the New Testament, speaking of Christ our Lord, we read, **“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”** (Hebrews 13:8). My friends, if God loved me yesterday, He is loving me today and He will love me tomorrow! You see, the great God who set His eternal love upon His people will never change or withdraw that love: **“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee”** (Jeremiah 31:3). God loves us when we do right; He loves us when we go astray or do wrong. And we are told of the Lord Jesus concerning His disciples, **“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end”** (John 13:1).

6. He ought to be sovereign because *God is benevolent and good*. Thank God He is not a wicked monster or tyrant. God ought to be sovereign because He is good, and because of all these great attributes that are revealed concerning Him, He ought to be sovereign, and HE IS! In Micah 7:18 it says, **“He delighteth in mercy.”** It ought to be the practice of every man of God to shut that sinner up to God’s mercy. And when once the sinner is shut up to face that God is sovereign, that God is holy, that God is omniscient, that God is on the throne, then the only thing that can reach that sinner is God’s mercy in Christ, God’s sovereign mercy. I have often thought that maybe the publican in Luke 18 had read this verse of Scripture—**“He delighteth in mercy”**—for he certainly saw his need of that mercy. He smote himself on the breast and cried, **“God be merciful to me a sinner”** (Luke 18:13)—**“to me THE sinner,”** I understand is a better way to express it. In Ephesians 2:4, we note that God is **“rich in mercy.”** Then in Psalm 136:1 we see that **“His mercy endureth forever.”** God (1.) *delights* in mercy; God (2.) is *rich* in mercy, and (3.) His mercy *endures forever*. How I rejoice in those three statements about the mercy of God; His mercy will never run out, and I stand in need of that mercy. I am a candidate for all the mercy and grace that God will pour out upon a poor sinner. And I am looking up into His face for mercy. I cannot stand on merit but on mercy.

We have seen that God is sovereign and we have seen that with the great attributes revealed about Him in Scripture, He is the One who ought to be sovereign. But we come to a third point, and it may be that some who have agreed with me so far will find some areas of disagreement here. But we must go on to consider—

III. WHEREIN GOD IS SOVEREIGN. Does the Bible teach that God is sovereign in every realm? I must take the position that our God is in Heaven and He does as He pleases, and He does so in every possible realm throughout all of creation. If it be true that God is not sovereign in every realm, then in reality He is not sovereign! But in the Scriptures we see God ruling as a sovereign in the spirit world, in the material world, in the world of space, and He does as He pleases in all.

1. *God is sovereign in creation.* If the great Creator God could create one world, He could create more if it pleased Him to do so. The great God who created the sun, and the moon and stars must be sovereign in creation. In Revelation 4:11, we are told plainly that God created everything and that He

did it for His own glory. According to the Bible, there was a time when there was no time! Are you listening? I know it is always hard on the first speaker, and you seem to be pulling on me too heavily. So, let's just relax and look at Divine truth tonight. The God of the Bible is sovereign in creation, and it was completely the option of His will whether to create or not. There was a time when there was nothing but eternity and no beings but the Triune God—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Then for wise reasons God began His program of creating all things in this Universe for His own glory—and He truly must have been sovereign in that creation. The Bible says God created the sun; then there was a time when there was no sun. The Bible says God created the moon and the stars; then there was a time when there was neither moon nor star. God created the Holy Angels; then there was a time when there were no angels. The Bible says God created this earth planet; then you can see that there was a time when earth did not exist. Finally God created man after His own image. Truly there was a time when none of these things existed—only in the mind of God—all of creation was in the form of invisible energies that stream from the mind of Almighty God.

You would be silly indeed to think that God began His program of creation and did not know how it would come out! I believe that God knew from eternity past all that He ever would know about His creation, and I recognize that this is a difficult consideration for our finite minds. If we get the wrong slant on some of these things, we could fall into the danger of fatalism. But leave creation and sovereignty in the hands of an all-wise and all-powerful God and you will have no trouble with it whatsoever. Not only did our God create everything for His own glory, but He is moving forward in control of His creation as a sovereign God. In Greenville, South Carolina we have a new building that is about seven or eight or ten stories high; it is called the Calhoun Towers. Before they ever laid a brick, before they ever poured the cement, before any building materials were laid on the site, some men called architects got together. They figured every detail of the design of that building; completing all the blueprints, they knew exactly how many rooms would be in that building, how many light bulbs, how many bathtubs, etc. Completion of the building added nothing to the architects' knowledge or plans. If puny man with his wisdom can figure out all the details of a million dollar building, don't you believe the Almighty God had some knowledge of what He was creating? I believe with all my heart that He knew all about it from the foundation of the world.

2. *God is sovereign in Redemption.* He was sovereign in every detail of the great work of redeeming His people. In John 10:17-18, Jesus said, ***"I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."*** The salvation of God's people is not an afterthought with God; it was a forethought and all through creation it was the central thought of His mind. I believe that Calvary has existed in the heart of God from eternity past to eternity future! When the Son of God came to earth He came on a mission—He was born to bleed and die. He did not die a martyr's death on Calvary nor did He accidentally get killed. He did not die for a cause, or as an example. Our Lord had a definite people in mind and He suffered at a definite time and in a definite way, according to the Scriptures, as He laid down His own life freely to fulfill the purpose of God for the salvation of His elect. When our Lord stood before Pontius Pilate, the old governor asked Him, ***"Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above"*** (John 19:10-11). That shut him up, didn't it? Everything depended on the will of God.

Satan has power but it is delegated power. Man has power but it is delegated power. The Bible says that power belongeth unto God. Satan and wicked men cannot move a single inch unless Almighty God gives them the power to do so. I must believe that, if I believe in an absolutely sovereign God. If man can ultimately break the will of God, then God is not sovereign. And of course we must distinguish between the revealed and the secret wills of God as we study these great truths.

3. *God is sovereign in administration.* One of the great chapters in the Bible on the sovereignty of God in administering the affairs of His church is seen in the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians. We are told that the Spirit, in giving gifts to the church, works and divides those gifts ***“to every man severally as he will”*** (1 Corinthians 12:11), and that ***“God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him”*** (verse 18). And He rules in the church as absolute sovereign in administration.

4. Then our *God is sovereign in salvation.* I do not believe that the salvation of God is in the hands of sinners. All through the Word of God we see that salvation is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it would be good for sinners to find out that God’s salvation is not like stew in a big pot, where you come and dip out the portion you desire. No, God’s salvation is not on a come-and-take-it basis, but is absolutely administered and given by the risen, ascended, glorified Christ. In Matthew 11:25-27, listen to the Saviour: ***“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”*** That is sovereignty, brother! It shows that the Lord has not turned the flow of His salvation over to any creature, but rules and administers it Himself. Notice also John 5:21, ***“The Son quickeneth whom he will.”*** I do not know of a verse in the Bible that is any more stubborn, any more humiliating to man’s proud flesh than that verse. It casts us alone on God for the salvation of sinners, and it gives Him all the glory.

Oh, what sovereignty is in those words, ***“The Son quickeneth whom he will”!*** Some time ago I was preaching in North Carolina when I met a young man who was disturbed along this line. He came to me and said, “Mr. Caldwell, I want to talk with you a bit on the matter of the sovereignty of God and of Christ in this matter of salvation.” I told him that I knew but little, but would try to help him. Then he continued, “I want to understand what part man has in his salvation. What does God do, and what does the sinner do?” And so I said, “My young preacher friend, I am not a thorough theologian and may not be able to answer all of these things to your satisfaction, but let me ask you a few questions.” He assented. “My first question, Is the sinner dead?” “Oh, well,” he replied, “I guess he is; the Bible says he is dead.” “Yes, I know the Bible says he is dead, but what do you say?” I was trying to rest for the evening service and so I told him, “I’ll just lie back here and take a little nap if you will study Ephesians 2:1 and John 5:21.” And so I rested and he studied, but pretty soon I heard the dear young preacher weeping, and I said, “What is wrong with you, my brother?” He said, “Oh, Mr. Caldwell, according to the Bible that natural sinner is dead.” I asked, “Do you really believe that he is dead?”

He continued to sob and said, “Yes, that sinner is in an awful condition; he is dead to God!” Then I asked him, “What can a dead man do?” “Oh,” he said, “that sinner is dead; he is in an awful condition before God!” “Yes, he is, my brother; he is in the house of death and he doesn’t have the key and cannot unlock himself and get out of the tomb of death, any more than Lazarus could arise and walk out of his dead stinking condition. But now what does a dead man need? Does he need his eyebrows trimmed a little? Does he need some lotion on his face, his hair fixed up a bit, his lips painted? What does he need?” The young man replied, “The only thing that a dead man needs is a resurrection!” “That is right, my brother,” said I, “and the only person that can raise a dead man, whether spiritually or physically, is none other than our divine Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!” Then again I pointed out John 5:21 where the Son quickens whom He wills. As he looked at that verse, he began to tremble and said, “Mr. Caldwell, does the Lord quicken all men?” And I told him that I had nothing to do with what happens to all men, but I can say that the Lord quickened me. And when He quickened me, He opened my heart, He opened my eyes, unstopped my ears, and there was life in me. When I was quickened I could hear the voice of God—not before. When I was quickened I could see the truth as I

had never seen it before—for when God opened my heart I discovered that I was a sinner, exceedingly so, and that I was a lost, helpless sinner who could not save himself. And only then did I begin to call upon the Name of the Lord and to seek His mercy, and God saved me by His mercy and grace.

At John 3, verse 8 we have another strong statement on the sovereignty of God in salvation. In talking to Nicodemus Jesus said, ***“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”*** As the wind, so is the work of the Spirit. The wind blows how it wills, the wind blows when it wills, the wind blows where it wills, and the wind blows upon whom it wills. And you and I need to see in this that God is sovereign not only in creation, redemption and administration, but He is also sovereign in our salvation.

I hear people talk about a recipe for revival, but I never have believed that nor do we see it in the Bible. God is the great God of revivals, of awakenings, of salvation, but these things must come from God. No manipulations or schemes or methods of man can bring a revival. We cannot pray down a revival, we cannot puff up a revival, but we must pray that revival will come from the only One who can send it. Just look up into the face of a sovereign God and remember that revival comes from Him. In Romans 9:15-16, Paul refers us back to the time when Moses asked to see the Lord’s glory, and ***“He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.”*** Oh, you have your idea that salvation is for “whosoever will,” as if a dead man could WILL anything. Life and repentance and faith all originate with God and God alone—for the only thing that a sinner can originate is SIN. And every old wicked sinner in the country has his own notion that he will take his fill of sin and then get right with God before he dies. Is that so? No, ***“it is not of him that willeth”***—it is not the sinner making up his mind to please God and “let God have His way” and accept God and get saved. It is ***“not of him that runneth,”*** not of your works. The other day I asked a fellow, “Are you saved? Do you know Christ?” He replied by assuring me that “I am doing the best I can.” I said, “Well, friend, your CAN is not big enough. You will have to have God do something for you and God must do something in you, if you ever know the grace of God.” It is ***“of God that showeth mercy.”***

Suppose that every lost man in Ashland, Ky. could be shut up to the sovereignty of God, understanding that God needs no power to put wicked men in Hell, and all He must do is let the sinner alone and that sinner will end up in the pits of Hell! No man will ever seek God until God first seeks that sinner! There you are, and all God has to do is snap the little brittle thread of life and you would plunge into Hell, and be there forever and ever! But God showeth mercy to some sinners, to whom He will show mercy. And I know that we have been inadequate to deal with this great subject of the Sovereignty of God, but at least I love to think about it in an hour when it appears that all we hold near and dear is about to be blown away, in an hour when kingdoms are tottering on the brink, and when religion seems so unable to cope with the deep needs of the people. It is a good time, my brother, to know that God is sovereign, that God is on the throne and that He is able to overrule evil and make all of it redound to the glory and honor of His own dear Name.

Pharaoh acted on his own wicked will, yet the will of God was accomplished. Judas Iscariot acted on his own will in betraying the Lord Jesus, yet the purpose of God was carried forth. And remember that God is on the throne now. God can take the deeds of the most wicked men and make them to serve His will and glory. Remember Joseph’s brethren were jealous of him, hated him, and carried out their own fleshly schemes and ungodly desires by selling him as a slave to Egypt; and yet it came out at the end of the narrative that God said, “You mean it for evil but I meant it for good!” And so I am glad to know and to testify that God is on the throne. Let come what may, let the thunders roll, the lightning flash, the bombs fall—let the infidels rage, but whatever comes if you and I are God’s people we are

destined for an eternity with God. And since God is on the throne, He will bring His people through all that Satan might plot against them. His rule as a sovereign stands firm yesterday, today and forever! And so we come to our final thought:

IV. HOW LONG WILL GOD BE SOVEREIGN? He has been sovereign yesterday, He is sovereign today—will He ever cease to be sovereign? As the eternal ages roll on, how long will God be supreme and sovereign?

God is eternal and immutable and therefore He must be, and will be, sovereign for all eternity! Remember that you and I, as His chosen people, are to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son, and one of these days the Lord is coming back. And when He returns to this earth there will be a resurrection, there will be a judgment, there will be an end to all things as we know them now and there will be a new deal. And out yonder somewhere, as Peter said, *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:13). And John said, *"I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Revelation 21:1-2). He further said that he saw God and the Lamb on the throne, and as long as eternity lasts God will be *God on the throne!* The sovereignty of God can never expire.

In that fair land where the flowers will never fade away, where the birds will never stop their singing, where there will never be any tears or sorrow—never a gun fired, never any sort of battle in that country, while God is on the throne forever! In Psalm 47:8 it says, *"God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness."* And in Hebrews we read, *"Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom"* (Hebrews 1:8). The Almighty here addresses His Son as "God." Do you believe that Jesus is God? If not God, who is He? He said He was God. He is the quickening Spirit, the Lord from Heaven, God over all, God blessed for ever.

Remember this, in closing: The purposes of God remain. God will finish His work; He will complete His church. The kingdom of God is unshakable and our God is a consuming fire and He has a purpose and a plan and program in all things. God is moving according to plan today, and He will be moving according to His plan forever. May God bless your hearts and use this message to comfort your hearts in the faith! Thank you. Amen. **B. B. Caldwell** (1899-1976)

- *Date originally preached was 1956, at the Bible Conference sponsored by Henry Mahan and Rolfe Barnard in Ashland, Kentucky. I believe it was held in November of that year. This is transcribed from tape and slightly abridged by Wylie Fulton. (There have been other printed versions of this sermon, but what we have here very closely follows what was actually given, as I have the original tape.)*
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