

# The Sovereign of the Universe

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald emphasizes the sovereignty of God as a source of comfort and assurance for believers in all circumstances.*

**Duration:** 34:44

**Scripture:** Isaiah 46:10, Ephesians 1:11, Philippians 1:21

**Topics:** "Sovereignty"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the book of Esther as a commentary on the sovereignty of God. He emphasizes that even in difficult times when we may not see it, God is still in control and working out his purposes. The speaker shares two personal stories to illustrate this point, one involving a plane landing safely despite a mistake in signaling, and another about a lost checkbook being returned at the perfect time. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God is sovereign and is working all things together for the good of those who love him.

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## Transcript

Last week we went in spirit to Bethlehem, lying in the manger. God can be ascribed to Him. We mentioned some of those attributes last week.

Marvelous when you think of it, isn't it? Omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence. They're all true of that. Wonderful child.

His name shall be called Wonderful. One of the attributes we mentioned was sovereignty. And I just want to pick up on that subject again today because that child born to Mary was the sovereign of the universe.

You wouldn't think so to look at him there in his rude crib. If ever there's a picture of weakness and dependence, it's that of a little baby, isn't it? So dependent on mother or on others. So weak, so helpless.

Yet I submit to you today that that child is the sovereign of the universe. I'd like to read three verses dealing with the sovereignty of God. The first is in Ephesians 1.11. Ephesians 1.11. I'm just breaking into the middle of a very extended sentence.

It says in verse 11, "...in whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." That is sovereignty. He works all things according to the counsel of his will. The second verse is in Isaiah.

Isaiah chapter 46 and verse 10. Speaking about the Lord and contrasting the living God with dead idols.

It says of the Lord, verse 10, "...and declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." That is sovereignty. My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure. The third verse is in Daniel chapter 4 and verse 35.

Daniel chapter 4 and verse 35. It says, "...all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing. He does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth no one can restrain his hand or say to him, What have you done?" We mentioned last week that sovereign means that the Lord does what he pleases.

He does according to his own good pleasure, but what he pleases is always right. It's always just. It's always fair to those who are involved.

When I think of the sovereignty of God, I think of a man playing checkers. I don't mean that in any irreverent sense, but merely as an illustration. He's moving the checkers on the board.

That's what God is doing in the universe today. He's moving the checkers on the board. The checkers could include believers.

It could include unbelievers as well. I think it's a wonderful thing today to realize that God is working out his purposes in the world, although it doesn't always seem so, does it? It oftentimes seems that evil is on the throne and wicked men seem to prosper. However, in spite of all appearances, God is working out his purposes, and not one of them will ever fail to come to pass a tremendous comfort to Christian people.

Because we might be going through really difficult times, and you might think, Well, God has lost control. If I'm a believer and if I'm trusting, where is God when all of these things are going on? No. God is still on the throne, and he will remember his own.

His promise is true. He will not forsake you. God is still on the throne.

Great comfort. William Cooper wrote, God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps on the sea and rides upon the storm.

I like that. We power under the storm. God rides upon the storm.

He uses the storm to accomplish his purposes. Cooper went on, Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall burst in blessing on your head.

I say the sovereignty of God is a wonderful comfort. It's a wonderful cause for worship, too. If you're here today, and you're saved by the grace of God, you should be a worshiper.

You know why? You should ask yourself the question, Why did he ever choose me? And I ask myself that question all the time. There are people, people with nicer personalities and better dispositions and sweeter temperaments than mine. And I think, why did God ever? Sovereignty.

Just because he does according to the counsel of his own will. And that will make me a worshiper for all eternity. Why has thou made me hear of thy voice and enter while thousands make a wretched choice? They'd rather starve than come.

And we suggested last week, too, that the contemplation of the sovereignty of the Lord is a tremendous motivation to submission to him. We sometimes sing it. I don't know how much we mean it.

We say, mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still. And I would suggest to you today that the more we're yielded to the Lord, the more we see his sovereignty in our lives. It really is an amazing thing that man can resist the will of God, isn't it? It's an amazing thing that man, created by God, can actually resist him.

When the Lord Jesus is here on earth, he showed his power over death. He showed his power over disease. He showed his power over the weather.

Only men said no to him. Only men rebelled against him. But he's called us by his grace, and he expects us to be submissive to him.

Someone might ask the question, if God is sovereign, why did he allow sin to enter? I think that's a good question. If God is sovereign, why did he ever allow? He didn't have to allow sin, that's true. But he did allow sin to enter.

In his sovereignty, God made men and women with the power of choice. He didn't have to do that. He could have made us so automatic that we would bow and worship him on the hour.

Just machines. He could have made us machines that would bow and worship him every hour on the hour. He would have got no glory out of that, making mechanical toys.

That's what we would have been. So in his sovereignty, he decided that he would give men the power of choice. Obey him, or disobey him.

And you know what happened. Sin entered the world because of the sin of men. Is God still sovereign? Yes, God is still sovereign.

How is he sovereign? Well, I'll tell you why. He allowed man to have his way into sin. Then he sent his lovely son down into the world to suffer, bleed, and die for sinners.

And through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, God has got more glory than if sin had never entered. And man has had greater blessing than if sin had never entered. In other words, if sin had never entered, Adam would just have enjoyed long life on earth indefinitely, as long as he didn't sin.

But he never would have had the hope of heaven. He would never have had the knowledge of being in Christ and being justified by grace and sanctified of all the blessings that are ours in the Lord. Adam would never have known that.

So I say that through the entrance of sin, God has brought more glory to himself, more blessing to mankind than if sin had never entered. God got the last word in his sovereignty, didn't he? The poet said, In Christ, the sons of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost. In Christ, the sons of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost.

And we see this, the Bible is a story of God working out his sovereignty. For instance, you see it in Joseph, don't you? You have to believe in the sovereignty of God. Joseph.

If ever a fellow got a bad deal, and it seems that the waves are against him all the time. You know, terrible. And one day his brothers throw him into a pit.

Boy, that's it. God's sovereignty is frustrated. No, it isn't.

Months before his brothers threw Joseph into the pit, God set a caravan in motion. Months before. Moved along, moved along, moved along.

Joseph thrown into the pit. Caravan comes on the scene. Looks at all of us.

God needs to get Joseph down to Egypt. And so he brings this caravan. Just comes at the right time.

Takes him out of the pit. Takes him down to Egypt. You tell me God isn't sovereign.

But even then, Joseph was down to Egypt, and he's thrown into jail. For doing what? For living a righteous life. For doing what? God's sovereignty is frustrated.

No, it isn't frustrated. Goes to work there in the jail, in the prison. He interprets dreams.

He's eventually brought before the Pharaoh. And before you know it, he's second in command in the kingdom of Egypt. God working out his sovereignty.

So in the case of Job, isn't it? Job in the Old Testament. No man ever suffered, though, the amount of loss in one day in the history of the world like Job did. Satan was allowed to have control, except he wasn't allowed to take his life.

And what that poor fellow went through, including three miserable comforters, who had a very warped view of God, and who said, all suffering is the result of sin. That's what they did. That was their message, and they only had one string on their violin, and they could only play one note on the string.

That was it. All sin is the result of suffering. Job had to face that day after day.

But before the end of the book comes, God reveals himself to Job as the creator, as the sustainer, as the God of providence. And Job is recovered. And at the end of the book, he has twice as much as he had when the book began.

Of course, you see it in the book of Esther. To me, Esther is a commentary on the sovereignty of God. God moving the checkers on the checkerboard, till an obscure Jewish girl becomes a queen and is able to act in the salvation of her people.

But you say, what has that got to do with us today? Well, it's got a lot to do with us today. Because, you know, I don't know about you, but I think we are entitled to see the sovereignty of God in our lives. Sometimes our eyes are closed by tears.

They're so filled with tears that we can't see the sovereignty of God. Or sometimes we're so occupied with things around us that we don't see the sovereignty of God. Let me tell you, it's just as simple.

You might laugh at it, it's so simple. But a year ago, Thanksgiving, I and two others were on a little trip, and we were on the other side of the Sierras, down at Lone Pine. And we committed the day to the Lord, and then we went into a restaurant to get breakfast.

We were on a drive from Lone Pine, up three hours to Tioga Pass, and come over the Tioga Pass road to Yosemite and then home. We committed the day to the Lord. We came to the Lord at the beginning of the day for an exchange of wills.

To give Him our will and to take His will for the day. We went into the restaurant, and we had breakfast, and we saw a car going by with a ski rack on top, and we laughed. There was never a time when skis were unnecessary.

It was at that time. This was the day after Thanksgiving. There was no snow.

When I went up to pay the bill, just to make conversation, I said to the waitress, you folks must be waiting for snow to help your business here. She said, I just heard on the radio, it's snowing at Tioga Pass, and they've closed the pass for the season. That saved us from driving three hours north and three hours back again, because all the passes at the north were closed for the season.

Closed by the snow, at least. I said, why did we eat in that restaurant? Why did I say that to the waitress when I was paying my bill? Why had she just heard those things on the radio? You know what we thought? God is sovereign. God is working out His purpose.

And I tell you, we worshiped the Lord that day for that display of His sovereignty. One of our interns has been serving the Lord out in the Philippines. His name is David Johnson.

He's a dentist, but he's serving the Lord there in evangelism and church planting. Earlier this year, he actually had just gone back from furlough, and he was with some Christians. They were in the house drinking coffee, and he was outside fixing somebody's tire.

And when he finally got in, the coffee was all gone, but the man made some more coffee. Now, I don't think he boiled the water. David became terrible sick.

He got conjunctivitis in his eyes. His limbs began to swell. And he got every kind of golly wobble that was going along.

In fact, he got so sick that they couldn't handle it out there in Manila, and he had to come back to the United States, and he checked in at Stanford Medical. And they finally diagnosed his condition as writer's syndrome. I never heard of it before.

Not writers like this, but R-E-I-T-E-R-S. I'm not sure it's curable in a sense, but in other words, it can recur at any time. And so there was a long period of recuperation there, and finally David became restless and wanted to go back to the Philippines.

Why would that happen? I mean, why did that happen? There's a guy, he turned his life over to the Lord. He wants to be... He has no ambition in life apart from being used by the Lord. Why did that happen to him? Well, it came time for him to go back to the Philippines, and the way it was scheduled was that his flight would take him to Honolulu.

He'd spend the night in Honolulu and go on from Honolulu. As usual. You can fly nonstop to Manila.

That was the way it was scheduled. While he was in the airport in Honolulu, he recognized a Filipina. He was writing letters at the time, but he stopped.

He looked up and saw this Filipina and he recognized her, and so he put his letters aside and he went and he spoke to her. He introduced himself, said his name was David Johnson, he was a missionary to the Philippines, and he said, I have a little booklet here called Ultimate Questions, and he said, I'd really like to give you a copy if you read it. It was Inelda Marcos, the widow of the late president of the Philippines.

If David hadn't developed writer's syndrome, he wouldn't have come home. And he wouldn't have been in the airport in Manila at that particular time. You think God can move the checkers? You see, at the time, it seems, why would this happen? God knows why it happened.

God is working out his wonderful purposes. What a wonderful thing to be yielded to the Lord, to be clay in the hands of the sovereign potter, and see him working out his wonderful purpose, and it's going on all the time. It's not with one or two choice servants, it's going on with God's people all the time.

Quite a few years ago now, I was in Bangkok, Thailand, on a visit with O.M. There was a young fellow there named Billy Bray, serving the Lord. He's not the famous Billy Bray. There was a famous Billy Bray, a man of prayer.

A law enforcement fellow was a man of prayer too. And one night he took me to the Oriental Hotel there in Bangkok, and we sat and talked, and he told me an interesting story. Although he was serving the Lord out there too, he also took a job writing news items for Time Magazine and Newsweek Magazine.

He used to send clips back to them, and if they published it, they paid him quite well. One night he went into the Oriental Hotel for supper, and he had his attaché case. He had his supper.

And when he left, he forgot his attaché case. But the waiter didn't forget it. The waiter got a hold of it and looked inside, and there was a checkbook inside.

And it had a nice balance in it, because Billy had just got a payment from Time Magazine for an article he had sent in. So, the waiter knew what he could do. Now let me go back.

When Billy Bray went to the bank, he always went to the same teller. Always went to the same teller. Never deviated from it.

And when he signed his name, he always signed it, Billy Bray, Phil 121. Standing for Philippians 121. One day the teller said to him, what's this Phil 121? And Billy said, well, that's my life verse.

He said, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. And he was able to testify to the teller. Well, let me go back to the waiter.

The waiter gets his attaché case, finds the checkbook, and makes out a check. A good, big, fat check. And goes down to the bank.

Which teller do you think he went to? I want to tell you, God is sovereign. And God can guide a thieving waiter. He went to the same teller that Billy always went to.

The teller looked at the check, looked good. The signature looked good, Billy Bray. But it didn't have Phil 121 after it.

And the teller knew that it should have Phil 121, and he knew what Phil 121 stood for. And so he called Billy Bray on the phone, and Billy Bray came in the bank, and the waiter fled. And Phil 121 paid Billy Bray

over a thousand dollars.

That's interesting, you know, why did the waiter go to that particular teller? And why did Billy just have a chance to tell a waiter what it was all about, the sovereignty of God? If we ever think that God has lost control of these words, or we have another thought come into it, he's still in control, and he's still working out his purposes. We don't always see it clearly. Let me tell you another story.

This is really remarkable. It has to do with Billy Graham's son, Franklin. Years ago, he was learning to fly, and he was going back to college, I believe, at the time.

They left Vero Beach, Florida, and the father prayed with him and his flight instructor before they left. They took off, and they found that the route they were going to follow, there were severe thunderstorms, and they had to deviate from the usual route. That route that they'd usually follow went over quite a few main cities that were well-lighted.

But as they flew along, they began to have engine trouble. They had an oil leak, and they lost power. The lights, at least, went out on the plane.

All the lights went out, and they realized they had to make an emergency landing, and they were going to have to land at Jackson, Mississippi. As they approached the field, Jackson, Mississippi, the lights went on. The lights went on on the runway.

At first, they had radioed ahead, I think, to Memphis, and just figured that Memphis would call Jackson, Mississippi. The lights not only went on, but they went on to full intensity on the main runway. And then as they came down, they saw a green light come on from the control tower that told them that it was clear for them to come in.

And they landed. When they landed there at Jackson, they were so grateful that they went up to the control tower to thank the air controller for his help. He said, I didn't know you were there until you were on the ground.

He said to them, he said, I didn't know your plane was there until you were on the ground. How did that happen? Kind of mysterious, isn't it? Some people had come to visit in the control tower, and the man in the control tower was showing them the various aspects of the work. Turned on the lights for the runway.

Turned on the lights completely so that they were very bright on the runway. Then he had a device that had three lights in it, red, orange, and green. He showed them in the control tower.

He showed them the red. He showed them the orange. But then for some reason that he didn't know, when it came to the green, he held his hand out the window and put on the green light.

He said it was all right for me. Somebody in the control tower said to him, there's a plane approaching. He said there's no plane within 50 miles of here at the present time.

And Franklin Graham's plane landed. And the man in the control tower didn't know anything about it. Now you tell me God isn't starving.

The timing of this, the timing of turning on the lights for the runway, turning them up to full, and putting the hand out the window with the green light saying it was all right, but he didn't know why he did it. Do you think God is sovereign? It's marvelous to me to think that they befell him. He's the sovereign of the

universe.

But all things are in his hands. He's controlling them by the word of his power. And those who are his by faith are the apple of his eye.

And he's working all things together for good to those who love him, who are the call according to his word. This is wonderful to know such a God, isn't it? And if we have any doubts that he's lost control, how confident we should be. So although we may not see it at the time that he's working out his purposes, one day we'll look back and say, my Jesus has done all things well.

Father, we do thank you for yourself, for your greatness and your goodness, for your wisdom and for your power. And we thank you for the Lord Jesus who enshrines all of these things in his blessed person. And our hearts are bowed this morning as we think of him coming from the ivory palaces down to this evil, wicked world to seek and to save that which is lost.

We think of him leaving that position in heaven, emptying himself of that position in the glory, coming down in the form of a baby to Bethlehem's manger, incarnate son of God, taking upon himself flesh that he might die for us. Our hearts bow low and worship before him this morning. And we pray that during this Christmas season we may have great thoughts of him, that we might honor him by great requests, that we might see beyond all the ornaments and the tinsel and see the lovely Lord Jesus, the sovereign of the universe.

We ask it in his worthy name.

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