

## My Text

Psalm 84:11

By [Rev. John Blanchard](#)

This is the very first time I've stood inside this wonderfully restructured and refurbished and repainted and re-gilded building, and I am hugely impressed by it all, I have to say. And I do want to thank the leadership of the church for going to all of this trouble and expense just for my visit this evening. I do appreciate that, and I was glad to be part of that time of prayer together, and especially interested in the fact that in structuring the corporate prayer, mention was made of that lovely acrostic: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication — the very subject on which I was preaching in Albuquerque, New Mexico, last night, and it's lovely to be reminded of that and its importance.

A number of years ago in England, one of the newspapers there, a Christian newspaper, invited me to be one of a number of preachers and others who contributed to a series entitled “My Text.” The object of the series would be, obviously, from those two words. Whoever was invited to contribute was asked to look back in their experience as a Christian to perhaps something at the time of their conversion or a critical moment in their life, or something that had been slowly more and more imbedded into their Christian life and experience...just one part of Scripture, one verse perhaps, or part of a verse even, that they would, from all the rest of Scripture (at least for the purposes of this series), entitle “My Text.” I accepted the invitation immediately, and soon discovered that I had as great a problem as I had a privilege! I could, for instance, certainly have chosen the first verse that (we use the phrase) “was given to me” as a young Christian. My aunt from the channel Island of Guernsey, where I was born and raised, wrote in a Bible Proverbs 3:5,6:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.”

That could certainly and properly have been my text.

It could certainly have been, as I came from a very hypocritical religious background, Paul's wonderful words in Ephesians 2:

“By grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.”

It could certainly have been that.

I had already in those days thousands of hours studying the tiny epistle of James, towards the end of the New Testament, and I could have chosen one of fifty verses, I guess, from that letter...“Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures,” for example. (James 1:18.)

It could certainly have been the verse in which (if you'll allow this colloquialism) God took me by the scruff of the neck and pulled me into full time Christian service, Exodus 4:12:

“Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

I think, however, that you've already guessed that it was none of the above! And instead, it came from Psalm 84 and the second part of verse 11:

“No good thing does He...” [That is, the Lord God...]

“No good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”

## **I. The sovereignty of God in prayer.**

And in the time that we have allocated for this kind of study tonight, I want to unpack that verse in the simplest way that I know how, and firstly, by seeking to show you that there is sovereignty in this verse.

Now of course the issue of the sovereignty of God is a massive biblical one so great that if you wanted to find a verse that spoke of the sovereignty of God, let me show you a really practical way that you could do that. You take your Bible, and you lay it on the spine like this, and you let it fall open. It doesn't matter where it falls, on that page there will be something that directly or indirectly alludes to the sovereignty of God. And certainly this statement does: “No good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless” infers that He [that is, the Lord God] not only has the right and the power, but the will to give or to withhold as He determines. He has the sovereign right to do such things, moved by nothing except His own nature and will, and He exercises that right. I do want to make that addition to what I've already said.

Do we really believe that? That may sound a strange thing to say in this church which has, and rightfully, such a fine reputation. But let me ask you as a gathering of people tonight, and ask myself too, do we really believe this? That when we speak of the sovereignty of God we are not merely [and how strange this is going to sound!] ...we are not merely speaking of His omnipotence. We

are speaking of more than that. We are saying not only that God is omnipotent, but that He does carry out His good and pleasing and perfect will. We're all familiar with the little evangelical saying, "Prayer changes things." But does prayer change things? If God is in sovereign control of every atom and proton and neutron in the entire universe, for example, does prayer change God or the way God is going to work?

Let me ask it in two distinct ways:

Is the will of God activated by our prayers?

Do we seek to worship a God who is almost the God of the deists: He's created the world, and there it is running along, and now He's left it, stood aside from it, and isn't really concerned about the day to day working of it? He's in neutral, if you will. But if enough people gather together to pray, and if they pray well enough and long enough and sincerely enough, God is stirred to activity and says, 'Well, I really wasn't going to do anything in that situation, but if these people at First Pres Jackson are praying about it, then I'll do something.' Is that what we mean when we say "prayer changes things"? God's will is activated by our prayers? Well, clearly we do not mean that. God, we are told in Scripture, does what pleases Him.

Well, let me ask another question. Is God's will altered by our prayers?

Do we worship a God who does have plans and thoughts and ideas and projects, but if enough people pray, and if enough people pray often enough and with the right kind of credentials, then God will take notice of that and will say, 'Well, I was going to operate in this kind of a way, but I think they've had a better idea. I think I will change and work in another way'?

There's a lovely thing — and I still remember seeing it in a Christian newspaper in England a number of years ago — it spoke about the moving around of a man of God. He'd been the pastor of a Baptist church, as it happened, (but that's not an issue here) and he had left that church to do another form of Christian service. But this is what the piece in the newspaper said. We'll call him...well, we won't try to identify him! But "Reverend Ligon Duncan has resigned from the pastorate of XYZ Baptist Church, and is now serving the Lord in an advisory capacity." Now I loved that! That sort of tickled my sense of humor!

Is that what happens when we pray? We're serving God in an advisory capacity; He has ideas, He has thoughts, but if we pray, if we pray well enough, if we pray long enough, then God changes His mind? Well, we know perfectly well that neither of those two scenarios is the right one. And someone listening to us, perhaps not wholly committed to the things of God, might say, "Then why do we bother to pray? God's will isn't activated by your prayers; God's will isn't altered by your prayers."

Why do you pray?"

My friends, here is the reason we pray: God's will is accomplished through our prayers.

Not by them, but through them. Think of the incident in I Kings 18 in the life of Elijah...the drought for three and a half years; Elijah sending his servant seven times to look towards the sea to see if there's any sign of rain, and on the seventh occasion a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, and eventually the rains came...after Elijah had prayed.

But hear me carefully: God had promised Elijah before he prayed that He would send rain, but He did not send rain until after he had prayed.

We sometimes read the history of revivals — and I don't mean by using the word *revival* the way it's sadly and wrongly used on this side of the pond about something that a church puts on for a week and gets an evangelist and so forth. I mean the real thing, as happened in the Hebrides, for example, on the west coast of Scotland. And I think of that particularly, because when I was preaching there, someone said to me, "You know, that revival, for all the stir that it caused, it began when a group of ladies met in this little village towards the west coast of the Isle of Lewis."

Well, I heard what they said. These ladies had prayed so faithfully, and gradually there was a stirring, and then there was a heaven-sent revival. But I think they were wrong. I think they were wrong in saying that revival began when those people prayed. Revival began in the heart of God, who determined to send revival to that place and moved in the hearts of His people to pray, for that was His will. And Derek Thomas has so beautifully reminded of that already tonight, that we are to be praying in the will of God; that God would work in our hearts in such a way that we are praying what He has wanted us to pray. Spurgeon says somewhere that true prayers, God-honoring prayers, are like homing pigeons. They are released from their real home, they find a resting place somewhere else for a while, and then they return home. They return to the heart of God from whence they came.

You see, the time to assess our true faith in the providence of God is not when everything is going well — when the sky is blue, and the roads are smooth, and the burdens are light, and everything, as we say, is coming up roses. The time to assess what we truly believe about the providence of God is when everything is going wrong. And there's no better example, I imagine, in all of Scripture than the book of Job (and we won't take time, because so many of you know it so well already), on that dreadful day when he heard first of this batch of animals, and then of that, and then of that, and then of every one of his sons and daughters perishing—in one day! Job may have heard all of that news (and you can read

about it in the early part of the book of Job) in less time than it takes us to hold this service here in this church tonight. But at the end of that day, Job bowed his head and worshiped. And worshiped! And said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

I love reading of the work of the covenanters in Scotland, one of the most famous being a man called Richard Cameron. And the dragoons eventually — the king's soldiers — found out where he was, on the Ayreshire Moors. They captured him; they cut off his hands and his head and sent them in a bloody parcel to Richard Cameron's father in Edinburgh and asked him, “Do you know whose these are?” And Cameron's father replied like this: “These are my son's; my own dear son's. Good is the will of the Lord, who can never wrong me or mine.” Now there was a man who truly believed in the sovereignty of God. You see, the sovereignty of God is not meant to be a slogan, a kind of Calvinistic catch-phrase: it's a living truth which is to undergird every moment of our lives. So there is sovereignty here.

## **II. The sufficiency of God to answer our prayers.**

And then, secondly, there is sufficiency here: “No good thing will He withhold.” Notice exactly what the psalmist is saying here. There are some good things that are given to all — to the upright saint and to the downright sinner — and given, it seems, in equal measure. And nowhere is there a clearer, simpler, more natural illustration of that than in the biblical statement, “God causes His sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” I hardly need to illustrate that.

Indeed, one can go further and say that there are times when it seems that the evil people in the world, the wicked people in the world, the godless in the world are getting more than their share of the good things. And if we notice that and remark on that and think about that, we have predecessors along those lines. Here is Jeremiah: “Why does the way of the wicked prosper?” And it's a lovely part in Jeremiah, wherein [and I have to paraphrase this, without taking time to turn it up] Jeremiah says, ‘O God, I know that You're a righteous God, and You do everything that's right, but I'd like a word with You about Your justice. I just want to have a little word with you about Your justice. Why does the way of the wicked prosper?’ Here is David in Psalm 94: “How long will the wicked be jubilant?”

But, my friends, hear me! There is a huge difference between having some good things given and the promise here that no good thing — no ultimately good thing — will be withheld. There's a very telling example of all that in Numbers 11. Take time for a moment to turn with me to Numbers 11. You know the incident here — part of the wanderings of the people of God in the desert, God's provision of the manna for them day after day, week after week, month after month amazingly.

And there was sufficient for all. But there wasn't enough for some. And verse 4:

“The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt...’”

[But notice also...]

“...the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic, but now we've lost our appetite. We never see anything but this manna.”

And they complained to Moses, and through Moses to God, and said we're simply not satisfied with what we're getting here. It's manna every morning and noon and night! It's manna for breakfast, it's manna sandwiches to take to work with us, manna at lunchtime, manna when we get home for dinner at night! And we need some protein!

And did God ever answer their prayer. He sent an airlift of protein...quail, knee deep for miles around, fell out of the sky. We're not told whether they were plucked, gutted, and oven-ready, but there they were! And now it was protein with everything, with every solitary meal. What a situation they were now in...they literally as well as metaphorically no longer had to trust God in the dark.

They had trusted Him in the dark. They went to bed at night (and you know the story well), and there was no food in the tent. And perhaps some of them with large families had nothing in the tent, and no refrigerator that they could go to in the middle of the night, either. Nothing. And they trusted God. And the next day there was sufficient manna for the day. Now they didn't have to trust God in the dark any longer! They were knee deep in quail, wherever they went. And before long, however, before the month was out, plagues set in. They got what they wanted, but it wasn't what they needed. And years later David said, “God gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease upon them.” They called the name of the place, by the way, *Kibroth-hattaavah*, which means *the graves of craving*.

And the challenge it seems to me to us tonight is this: Are we prepared to let God determine what is best for us, or are we restlessly pursuing our own self-centered agenda?

You see, God, in His providence and in His wisdom, and in His love, may withhold from us great prosperity, notable success, outstanding and long-lasting health, a life partner—all of them on the surface, good things. And God may, in His love and wisdom and providence and goodness, withhold those things from us. Not having those things is not a sign of God's displeasure, and gaining those things is not a matter merely for us to snap our fingers and demand them from God because He's the Father, and surely a father would give us all those things.

And it would not matter to me if every television evangelist in your country said so in every program (and that's very nearly the case), it would still not be so.

But He will not withhold from us anything that is ultimately for His eternal glory and for our eternal good, and that seems to me to be the emphasis of Paul's great statement in Romans 8:28, "We know that in all things God works for the good ..." [and I'm sure we cannot insert into Scripture, but we can understand what it is saying: for the eternal good] "God works for the good of those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose." Whatever God providentially disposes to His people is designed for their spiritual and eternal good. It's not always what we expect, not always what we hope, not always what we think; certainly not always what we want.

The most wonderful biblical example of this is with the Apostle Paul and the thorn in the flesh...and we won't detain ourselves by asking what that might have been. What we do know is that Paul prayed three times that this would be removed. That is not an example of persistence in prayer, by the way! Even I have prayed more than three times for many things. It was exactly the opposite of an example of persistence in prayer. Paul prayed only three times for this clearly very serious issue to be resolved, and in a wonderful part of the revelation of God in Scripture, God tells him that He is not going to answer that prayer, and tells him why.

And Paul autobiographically testifies, firstly in verse 7 there, "to keep me from becoming conceited," and secondly "that the power of Christ might rest upon me." And he accepted the thorn because he saw the throne. His testimony was not "God has healed me, and God will heal anybody who simply prays that kind of prayer." So Paul was not born at the wrong age; he could never have had a television ministry for that reason! His testimony was not "God has healed me, and He will heal you if you do a, b, and c." His testimony was "God has not healed me, but by His grace I am able to go and grow through this experience."

I recall preaching in Oklahoma on one occasion many years ago, and was to share a Bible conference with Dr. E. F. Hallock, who was known among the Southern Baptist Convention especially in that part of the country as "Preacher Hallock." And I knew that he had a particularly rewarding and fruitful ministry on the subject of prayer, and I simply couldn't wait to get there and share a week of ministry with him and listen to him, and so on and so forth. As soon as I arrived at the airport, I was met by the pastor of the church and was told that Dr. Hallock would not be there. He was very sick indeed, and somebody else had taken his place. I was deeply disappointed, and then discovered that he lived in Norman, Oklahoma, not very far from where we were, and I said, "Well, do you think there's a possibility of going to visit him? I'd love to visit him, I've heard so much about him. I just want to meet him." "Yes, of course we can do that." And so we drove out to Norman, Oklahoma, and I can still remember vividly, and it was many years ago, going into that little white frame house. And there sitting in his rocking chair on the right hand side of the front room was frail, weak Preacher

Hallock.

And I literally sat at his feet. I sat on the floor to be very close to him and hear what he had to say. He spoke for quite some time. He told me of how his illness had gradually got worse and worse, he was now suffering from advanced bone cancer, could hardly sleep at night. I remember the phrase—he said, “Every bone in my body was burning like a fire, and one night I prayed to God and said, ‘Father, will You not give me the gift of healing?’” And he said, “God replied, ‘No, Preacher’...” [And I love that touch! It was just as if God knew, too, that that was how he was called colloquially.] “No, Preacher. I’m not going to give you that. I’m going to give you the stewardship of suffering.” And it may well be that for all of Preacher Hallock’s long ministry, more was achieved through his stewardship of suffering than through his fit ministry of preaching. I do know that one then fairly young British preacher was affected permanently by what he heard on that day.

There is sufficiency here. God’s power is sufficient to remove whatever burden or pain or pressure, or deprivation or hardship, from which we may be suffering. God’s power is sufficient to remove all of those, and to do so in an instant. But His grace is sufficient to sustain us, if in His wisdom He chooses not to remove it. And His grace is sufficient for us.

I think again of ...I always think of her as a young lady, because I never sort of feel I’m getting older, except when I try to run up pulpit stairs! And I always think of this as a young lady, but, heavens, she is...well, she is as I, now in her seventies. But I can remember her from when she and I were both young Christians together, and at a cruelly young age she began to suffer from various kinds of degeneration in her body. She has, as far as I know, hardly known a painless moment for the last thirty years. I don’t know of any more radiant Christian with whom I am occasionally in touch. She is a living example of the grace of God being sufficient, when His wisdom determines that what we would humanly speaking long to be rid of, when in His wisdom He determines that that is not going to be the case.

We might dare to call it, my friends, a “win-win situation.” If God removes the burden, the pain, the heartache, the agony, then we’ve won. And if God does not remove it and works in us such a wondrous grace that we can be ministered to in such a powerful way, and minister through that pain to others, then we’ve won again. It’s a win-win situation.

### **III. The simplicity of obedience to God in prayer.**

So there is sovereignty here, there is sufficiency here; and then as we close I want you to notice that there is simplicity here. We’ve been looking, as it were, at a state of blessing, a state of grace to which all Christians should aspire. But what is the key to it all? Well, certainly it’s not knowledge. God doesn’t promise



His best to those who know the most. Right doctrine is something we should strive after, and we should all be diligent theologians within the limits of our capacity. We really should! We should press as hard as we can down that line and that road. But right doctrine is not synonymous with the grace of God.

No, the key is not orthodoxy; it is instead obedience. And it's right there in the text: "...those whose walk is blameless." That was something Jesus himself said in John 13: "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." And there immediately we see that doctrine is not the answer. Strive after doctrine with every sinew at your disposal, but that is not the answer. You will be blessed—"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Let me just flesh that out in two ways as we do close now. I'm going to call the first of these "practical obedience." And what I mean by that is that here is something...here is an issue in your life. It may be in your own heart, your own discipline, your own devotional life, the matter of your giving to Christian causes, your personal witnessing, something within your home or your family or your business. It could be anywhere in your life, but there is an issue on which God has spoken to you through His word and by His Spirit. He has spoken to you. It's been impressed upon you more and more. This is what God is telling me to do. But...but.... That's the problem. You're digging your heels in, and you're just not prepared to obey what God is saying to you there. My friends, if that is the case, you will never be able to live in the enjoyment of this statement in Psalm 84 unless that is put right. Is there an issue in your life in which God has been telling you something—either to do something, or indeed not to do something? To refrain, to back off from doing something? It may not be a climactic thing, but there is something, and you know in your heart — your conscience is reminding you, 'God has spoken to me about that, and thus far I'm saying no.'

Then this verse will mean nothing to you. You won't be able to lay hold upon the promise of this verse until that is put right. Practical obedience.

And the other is what I'm going to call "spiritual obedience." It's an honest willingness to submit to God's unrevealed will. I've been speaking about God's revealed will. God has spoken, but so much...most...of God's will for your life in detail is unrevealed. Are you prepared to be obedient to God's unrevealed will? And if you ask what I mean by that, I mean this: When we pray in the words of The Lord's Prayer, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," I sometimes think the prayer is (a) too small; and, (b) too big! Just "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" — just a few words. But "Your will be done on earth? I mean, all over the earth? As it is in heaven?" Then would that not be sufficient every morning to get up and to say, "Father, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, Amen" and go to work? That covers everything, doesn't it? Covers all the issues here in the prayer bulletin tonight? Look at all these names, all these situations in China, in hospital, in French Camp Academy. So many different issues. Well, why don't we just say...why didn't Dr. Duncan just say at the

beginning of the service, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, Amen”? That's the end of that.

But I have a friend who's been blind since he was eighteen months of age, blinded through measles, of all things. And he does quite a bit of preaching and is a fine, warm-hearted preacher. When he comes to expound The Lord's Prayer and comes to this particular petition, he muses on it, as it were, in public: “Your will be done on earth. Well, man is of the dust of the earth, so I am part of the ‘on earth.’ Lord, Your will be done in this part of earth, as it is in heaven.” It reminds me — and it escapes me for the moment just who it was — who drew a circle in the dust around him and prayed, “Lord, send a great revival, and let it begin in this circle.”

But now what a prayer it becomes! “Lord, I am willing for Your will to be done in my life, as it is in heaven.” And how is the will of God done in heaven? Well, of course it's done immediately. Can you imagine an angel, an archangel, or a cherubim or seraphim saying, “Yes, Lord, but my schedule's very big at the moment. It's going to take a million years before I can get around to it.” Sure it's done gladly...can you imagine one of the angels saying, “Well, if I have to do it, I'll do it, but I really don't feel like this”? It's done whole-heartedly...well, you can add your own adverbs there. Of course it's done immediately, it's done gladly, it's done whole-heartedly, and it is done consciously to the glory of God.

Now what a prayer does this become? “Lord, I don't know what lies ahead. Lord, make me willing, by the working of Your Spirit in my heart, through the teaching of the Scripture, make me willing, truly willing, unfailingly willing, for Your will to be done in my life as it is in heaven.”

And before us we have the promise that no good thing, nothing that is ultimately and eternally good, no good thing will He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

Let us pray together.

*The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in You. Father, make us, each one of us, that kind of man, that kind of woman, that kind of person who trusts utterly in You, and has the joy of seeing and knowing You at work in their lives. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

[Congregation sings *The Doxology*]

*And to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.*

*And all God's people said,*

*Amen.*

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