

The Over-Ruling of God

by J. Henry Brown

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and trusting in God's overruling presence in our lives and missions.

Duration: 35:52

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 10:38-42, John 14:26, Acts 16:4, Acts 16:9-10, Romans 8:28

Topics: "Divine Providence", "Evangelism"

Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker shares a personal experience of encountering a group of people in white gowns in a foreign land. Despite the initial language barrier, the speaker surprises them by greeting them in their own language, leaving them astonished. The speaker then discusses their journey to Africa and how they were invited to assist an evangelist in tent evangelization. However, the evangelist falls ill and asks the speaker to continue preaching in their absence. The speaker expresses their initial hesitation but eventually agrees to preach and witnesses people coming to faith in Christ.

Transcript

I'm very glad of another opportunity of speaking to you, and I have in mind this evening the thought of how God overrules. Last week we were bringing before you somewhat our credentials, the beginnings of service for the Lord. Tonight I'm thinking in this way, the way, the wonderful way in which God overrules.

He does according to the counsel of his own mind and will. He rules, he overrules, he moves behind the scenes, and he moves all the scenes he is behind. What do you think of that? And he is still on the throne, and he's still ruling, and he found God.

Well, we know that all things will work out for his glory, and for our eternal good. I'm looking back, not putting in my hand of a plow and looking back, but having been in full-time service for the Lord for just about 50 years, I have been looking back, looking back to see a little more clearly how God has overruled in my life. And I find it's really very wonderful.

I never saw it before. Actually, when these things were happening, I didn't realize this. But now these years have passed, and I look back, I marvel greatly at the way God was overruling.

There are one or two verses I'd like to draw your attention to in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 16, but I'll read them for you as nicely as I can. The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 16, and this has to do with Paul,

and Silas, and Timotheus, who joined with them. And Acts, chapter 16, verse 4 says, And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were in Jerusalem.

And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now, when they had gone through Phrygia, the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, notice that, they were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they were come to Mysia, they are said to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not.

In verse 6, forbidden of the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. Now, they are said to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not. Verse 10, verse 9, And a vision appeared to Paul in the night, lest to the man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us.

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. So, you see how God was overruling with regard to his servants in those days, in those early days, and he has done so all the way through the years.

And, as I say, I've been looking back, and I've seen much more clearly how God did overrule with regard to my early days. Because, last week I mentioned to you how I came to know Christ as my Savior in a very remarkable way. I can see the Lord was overruling in all that.

He brought me into that position. He brought that man into my life, and it made me think, and it made me think hard. And so, God overruled until I didn't want to go to that place to listen to the gospel, but he overruled, and that's where I went.

And then again I went. I didn't want to go, but I went, and each time I feel the Lord was overruling. And, as I listened, he was opening up the truth to me, convicting me of sin, righteousness, judgment, and leading me to that repentance and faith in Christ.

Overruling all the way through until I was baptized, then brought into a Sunday school, and then right away through until I became interested in missionary work, and then overruling again. My desire to go to Iceland determined in my own way to go there, too. And the Lord overruled, took me right away out to the office where I never wanted to go, and then again overruling when I came out onto the shore there, and found that little company of Africans reading a book.

I didn't know what it was, and I passed them by many times until I couldn't pass them by. I had to stop, and then I tried to find out what the book was. Now, God was overruling because that got me interested in the language, and within five months I found I could preach the gospel in that language, a very simple way, and I could teach in a very simple way.

God overruled, and all the way through, leaving those shores, getting back to England, and then at last feeling that Lord was overruling, and he meant me to go back to Africa. Now notice, overruling. I thought that once I made my design known to go to Africa that the way would open up quickly.

We'd find our way on, we'd find ourselves on our way back to Africa, but it didn't happen like that. I was invited to go out with an evangelist. He said, uh, why not spend a little time with me? Well, I said, you know, we're waiting to go to Africa.

Well, he said, when are you going? No idea. Well then, whilst you're waiting, why not help me? You'll get experience. I said, well, I've never done tent work.

I've never been in tent evangelization. I don't know anything about it. He said, it's all right, I'll be doing it, but you'll be helping me.

You'll get to know. So, I went with him, and we started. We put the big tent up, and we began to preach the gospel, and lots of people were coming in.

We had the sides of the tent let down, and people were standing around outside, and night by night, two or three people stayed behind for conversation, and professed faith in Christ. Well, I enjoyed this. I thought this is fine.

This is a great work. I've never been in this before. Then, after about a week, he took ill, and he came to me, and said, I'm feeling terribly ill.

I have to go home, and see the doctor. Oh, I said, well, I'll tell the people that no more meetings until you come back. Oh, no, don't do that.

He said, there's a big crowd of people coming in. I said, well, you're going away. So, he said, I said, I'll tell them that there's no more meetings until you come back.

Oh, no, no, no, don't do that. Well, what do I do? Well, you preach. Oh, but I said, well, I've never done that.

He said, you pray about it, and preach. So, he said, I must go home, and away he went. So, I preached, and to my amazement, there were two people stayed behind.

They might have conversation, and professed to be saved, and that was a big encouragement, and the next night, I was on again, and each night, but I was beginning to wonder now, just how long can I go on? Because this is altogether new, and you know, I could see that my little stock of sermons was going to be exhausted very quickly, and so I thought, I shall be glad when he comes back. So, I waited, I carried on as the Lord helped me to carry on, and then he came back. Oh, was I pleased, and as he came along, I said, well, now you can take over.

I'm just about exhausted. I've got to the end of myself. Oh, he said, I've only come to tell you I can't come.

I said, what? He said, I've only come to tell you I can't come. I said, what do you mean? Well, he says, I've been to see the doctor. He says, my heart's in a dreadful way, and I'll have to lie on my back for a couple of months.

Oh, I said, I'll take down the tent, and pack it away for you. No, no, no, he says, you don't do that. What do I do? You just carry on.

I said, I've just about got to the end of my terror just now. He said, you pray about it, and carry on. And so, I was obliged in this way to go on, and on, week after week, hoping that this man would perhaps come back a little sooner.

No, no, he didn't come back at all, and I went right away through with that tent until the weather began to break, and in England, when it breaks, you know, it does break, and I said to the people, look, the weather

is broken, and now the first night, day, clear, dry day, this tent's got to come down, and I'm going to pack it away. It must be dry, otherwise the canvas will rot. So, I said, now the first day we finish the meetings here, the tent's coming down.

They said, well, we don't want it to come down, you know. I said, no. They said, we want the meetings to go on.

I said, no, we've come to the end of it now, and this tent's coming down. And so, it continued to rain. It went on raining, it rained, and it rained, and I battled on with the meetings, and it rained, and rained.

I thought myself, I don't understand this, and then I said to them, you know, I don't understand this weather going on like this, not even one little bit of sunshine. They said, well, Mr. Brown, we've got a confession to make. I said, a what? A confession to make.

I said, and what's that? Well, they said, you know, we didn't want these meetings to stop. We didn't want you to take the tent down, so after each meeting we've gone into this man's house, and we had a prayer meeting, and prayed to the Lord to keep it raining. Oh, I said, what a thing to do.

Well, they said, we're confessing it, you'll forgive us won't you? So, at last we got a dry day, and down came the tent, and we packed it up, and then they said to me, you're not going to leave us are you? Well, I said, you've heard the gospel, and you're saved. Well, yes, but what are we going to do? Well, I said, you're saved, and you're all right now. Yeah, but they said, you know, once or twice you mentioned baptism didn't you? Well, I said, yes, I mentioned baptism.

Well, what about it? What do you mean? Well, couldn't we have one or two meetings, and could we go into this? Would you explain it to us more? Because all we know is, well, you know, in the church they they christen the baby and so on, but we don't know about this. Can you help us? So, I said, what yes. So, we had some meetings in the big room that they had already hired, they seemed to be very sure of themselves, and we went into the mass of baptism, and they said, well, we want to have a meeting on our own now.

Oh, you don't want me there? No, we don't want you. All right, we'll carry on. So, they had a meeting on their own, and then the next night they said, now Mr Brown, that we're all ready.

Ready for what? They said, ready to be baptized. I said, you explained it all to us, we've talked it over, and we all want to be baptized. So, were you baptized? I said, I've never baptized anybody.

I was always the elders in the church that baptized. I never baptized anybody. Well, they said, you preach the gospel to us.

Who else is going to baptize us? So, I said, well, well, yes, I support. So, I said, well, just a minute. Now, where can I baptize you? They said, well, we've got a river down the bottom of the village there.

I said, a river? Yes. Isn't that all right? Well, yeah, yeah, of course it is. Yes, yes, that'll be all right.

We're ready. We're ready to be baptized. Down there.

So, I thought, well, this is something. I never baptized anybody. You know, at the time, I never thought, this is the Lord overruling, you see.

This man's sick, and I'm just obliged to go on. And everything, you see, how the Lord was overruling. I never went out there to start preaching, and then when I found they had believed, I was going to baptize them, and then I was going to go on.

No, no, no. The one thing in my mind, if I had preached the gospel, and the people could be saved, and they were, but now something else had come up. What about baptism? Now they've baptized.

So, I said, well, now, you're all right now. They said, well, you're not going to leave us, are you? Well, I said, well, what do you want me to do? Well, I said, this is driver there. You know, she's got a spare room, and you could take that over, and the sisters are going to see that you get your meals every day.

I said, what are we going to do? Well, they said, we want you to teach us. You want to help us to know more about the scriptures, you see. So, I said, well, yes, I suppose so, yes.

That was what the Lord said. Go out and make disciples of all nations, and baptize them, and teach them, and I thought, well, yeah, that's it. So, I said, all right, I'll do what I can.

So, I stayed with them to teach them, and then as we went on with this, they began to say, you know, we're hiring this room, and it's not quite big enough. We'd like to have a church building of our own. I said, well, I'm not a builder.

Never put one brick on top of another in my life. They said, no, but you know, we are busy men, and we thought perhaps, you know, perhaps you could help us in some way. Well, I said, oh no, perhaps you could look around a bit, you know.

You might find one of these army huts that we could move, and erect, you know, and have meetings there for a time. Yes, all right. So, I ran around the country, but couldn't find anything, and then they came to one day, and they said, look at this, and they had a paper there, and they said, see this? So, I read it, and it said a Methodist church for sale, 75 miles away.

Well, I said, you can't go 70 miles, and 35 miles to church, right? Well, they said, no, no, we're thinking of moving it. Well, I said, this thing maybe has never been built to be moved. It says Methodist church, and we can't move that.

Well, did you overhear? I dare say, but not in those days, anyway. So, I said, well, but you could go down and see it, couldn't you? But, I said, it wouldn't be a movable thing. Well, we think it is, but anyway, this brother will lend you a motorcycle, and you can go down and have a look at it.

So, I took the motorcycle, I went 75 miles, and I found a place, and I looked around, and I found this building, and I found a caretaker, and he took me in, and had a good look in, and I thought, this is just the place. It was never put up to be moved, but I had a good look at it, and I reckoned it could be moved. So, I thought, well, I'm letting myself in for something now.

But, I went back, and I said, just the place, is it? But, I said, it was never put up to be moved. Oh, but don't you think it could be moved? I said, well, I think maybe it could, but it's going to be a bit of a job. Well, they said, we'll have it.

Oh, no, I said, wait a minute, 75 miles away. They said, we'll have it. Now, I said, it's got to be paid for.

That's all right. So, they had a meeting, and the next day, they came and said, we've got the money. I said, you what? We've got the money.

Well, I said, they pay for that place? Yes, we've got it. Would you go down and get it? I said, now wait a bit. You want me to go down with this motorbike, and put it on the carrier at the back, and bring it back? What's the idea? They said, no, no, no, but you know, you know all about this.

You can help us. No, maybe you could find somebody to help you. I'm going to pay them, you know, for helping you.

Oh, I said, well, it's a bit of a job. I said, 75 miles? Yes. So, we've got the money.

Now, we want you to go and get some help, and take that place down, and bring it up here, and we'll have I said, now wait a minute. Now, where are you going to put it, if I bring it? Oh, yes, we never thought about that. We'd have to have some way to put it, wouldn't we? I said, you've got some way to put it.

So, they said, we'll have another meeting, because there's another meeting, and we want you to be there. So, I was there, and they put this matter before these people, and an old cobbler, a shoemaker, was sitting there, and he said, what's that? So, they told him, what a piece of ground to put the chapel on. Oh, I've got a field up there.

He said, you can allow that. We'll fix it up with a, with a cylinder there. Right, go and get it.

We've got a place to put it up. So, I found myself going down 75 miles. I found two Christians out of work, and we set through, and in a week we had all this placed down.

It was covered ceiling and walls with matchwood boarding, and we had to number all those boards, but we took it down. We made sanctions, and we had three big transport lorries that were diverted from south, and they came up, they picked the stuff up. Meanwhile, I sent up a drawing, and they put in a foundation, and in about a month's time we had that building back up, and you would never know that it had been moved.

That was in 1920. About four months ago, I went to that very same place, and I had two weeks meetings in that very same building. They've enlarged it, and they've got quite a nice big Sunday school there, and it was a joy to go back after all these years, and find that those people had continued.

But, you see how the Lord overruled in all this? After I'd finished there, then I had the tent packed away, and they said to me the next year that tent is still there, and that man is still a sick man. Would you like to use it? Well, I'm going to Africa, you know. Well, where are you going? I don't know.

So, I got that tent out again, and I used it during the summer months, and the same thing happened. I saw them say I baptized them in a river at the bottom of the village, and I continued with them, and I helped them to get a building, and then I came away. 1922.

I was back there about three months ago, had two weeks meetings of fellowship with them. Great to be back among them after all these years. They're still carrying on a testimony from the Lord.

Then I thought, well maybe we'll get to Africa now. No. The Lord still overruled, and what? They said the tent's still there, unless it rambles, it's still a sick man.

So, I got it out again, and the same thing happened the third year, and another assembly was formed. Now, after all this, the Lord opened the way, and we came out to central Africa. You know, sometimes I wonder.

Years ago, people in Great Britain, and over here in America, were talking about darkest Africa. And I wonder sometimes, who was really in the dark? Well, it was the folk over there in Africa, and the folk over here, and over there in Great Britain. Darkest Africa.

You know, when we got up into central Africa, we couldn't find a single man or woman who knew that he or she was an African. Not what? Not one of them could pronounce the name. As far as we in America, as far as we in Great Britain were concerned, all those people were Africans.

Strangely, not one of them knew it. Not one of them had ever heard it. They knew they belonged to this tribe, or that tribe, or the other tribe, but never did they know that they were Africans.

People said to me, how do you get on with the Kaffirs? Kaffirs? They believe there was a great Kaffir tribe. And you know, in South Africa, you will find people talking about the Kaffirs, the coloured people, the Kaffirs. They talk about Kaffir corn, and they talk about Kaffir beer, and they talk about a Kaffir male that takes the male up country.

Kaffir, Kaffir, Kaffir. And people come and say, well, how do you get on with the Kaffirs out there? Oh, I said, I get on very well with them all. The brown, and the black, and the yellow, and the white, all of them.

We get on very... No, no, no. We're talking about the Kaffirs. That's all right.

Oh, wait a minute. We mean the, you know, the black people. Well, I said, the white people are Kaffirs as well.

Oh, just a moment. I said, yes, that's right. You see, the word Kaffir is an Arabic word, and it means unbeliever, an unbeliever.

So, when the Arabs came in in search of ivory, found the ivory, made the black man carry the ivory to the coast, and then it suddenly dawned on him, not only could he sell the white ivory, he could sell the black ivory as well, until began slavery. So, the Arabs came in, and because the Africans did not believe in Muhammad, then they called him an unbeliever. Kaffir, hey, you Kaffir, come on, now you Kaffirs get going.

You see, and then everybody else coming in, the Portuguese, the Belgians, the Boers, the Dutch, the British, all came in, and all started saying, Kaffirs, come on you Kaffirs, and so established that the Kaffir tribe never was, never will be. Who's in the dark? So, then we were all going through into Central Africa, and we passed through South Africa, and were amazed at much we found there of Kaffir. We went up to join in with a man named Dan Crawford, Scotsman, saved by the grace of God, way up there in Scotland, in Guric, the Iberian.

He came out as a boy of 19, and he was a suspected TBC. I think they thought of turning him down, actually, not letting him go, but he did. He arrived out, went through Portuguese, what is Portuguese West Africa, and there were four or five others with him, but they didn't live.

They all died there, were buried, but he got through, and he got through into what is called Katanga, now in Belgian Congo, and then he moved up country, and he was out there for 22 years before he came out. 22 years in the long glass, and he came out in 1912. Went over to India, and then came over to America, and while over in America he wrote a book called Thinking Black.

He certainly knew how these black people thought, so he wrote this book Thinking Black. Amazing book, really. Then he went back to Africa, and he wrote another one, Back to the Long Grass, or My Link with Livingston.

So, we went out to join up with Dan Crawford, and we found him a most remarkable man. At that time he had translated all the New Testament in that particular language, and he was working hard on the Old Testament. We stayed there for a little while, and then we wanted to move out further east, the way out towards Tanganyika, because that's where we were during the war, and that's where I wanted to get back.

But this was a stepping-off place where Dan Crawford was, and after being there for about a year, doing what we could to help in the work, and knowing the language, because the language which I'd learned out in East Africa was the lingua franca of the whole of the Belgian Congo, I could go to any part of the Congo and preach the gospel. That was something, and so he too could speak Swahili, and we stayed for about a year, and then I said we would like to go to the north. Well, he said we've never been further than the top end of the lake there, and we don't know about that area, but you can go and have a look.

So, we went. We moved away to the north of this very big lake. You can't see the other side, more like an ocean, and when we got there I got a big surprise, because I found a lot of people walking around, and they got long white gowns and white school caps, you know.

Oh, I felt at home. This was like being out in East Africa, and I saw five or six of them standing there talking together, so I walked up towards them slowly, and I was listening, and I knew their language, and I knew what they were saying. They were talking about me.

They thought I'd just come into the area, and probably I had no idea of the language, you see. So, they were saying to themselves, wonder who he is, where he's come, what do you think he's going to do out here, and I listened to all this, you know, moving up slowly, and then I walked around in front of them, and I gave them their their own greetings, in their own, you should have seen the look on their faces. Where have you come from? I said I come from Dar es Salaam, from Bagamoya.

Oh, they said you're from our country. Yes, I found a population of people there. Right away they had a column, and an offshoot of that makes people who belong to Dar es Salaam.

Where I had been, where I knew the people, a big population. I felt really at home. We went back to Crawford, and said look, that's where we want to be.

We're moving into our own territory, you know. So, eventually we did. We moved into that district, and we began our preaching of the gospel.

Now, I always feel somewhat embarrassed in talking about missionary work, because, you know, there's so much of that personal pronoun comes into it, you know. I, I, and me, and my, all the way through. And I remember that Dan Crawford, this is quite a sense of humor.

He used to quote from Proverbs chapter 32 verse 1. No, don't look it up. There's only 31 chapters in Proverbs. But he said this was Proverbs 32 verse 1, and he said it reads something like this.

He that bloweth not his own sompit, the same shall not be blown. But he that bloweth his own sompit, the same shall be blown with a much netter. And I feel that when we're talking about missionary work, we're inclined to blow our trumpets.

I mean my, what I did, what we did, you know. And this goes on and on. It's endless.

That, may I say this in closing, we were with Dan Crawford for that year, and then we moved to the north, and then one day, 1926, we went out there to him in 1923. In 26, I saw a runner coming. You know, these runners, the Africans, come along with a little bit of a reed and a letter held in it, and they come running along mile after mile.

Some of them do 35, 40 miles a day. And he came carrying along with this thing, handed it to me, and I read it, and it said, Dan Crawford was seriously ill. Would I go and come as quickly as possible? So, I made my way as quickly as I could, and I got there a couple of days later in the evening, and I found Dan Crawford was in a very serious condition indeed.

In the night, he had knocked his hand, back of his hand, and it didn't seem much of a thing. It was just a little mark, but it became worse, until the arm was all swollen, and all turned blue. And Mrs. Crawford had done what she could for it.

She was a trained nurse, but it wasn't yielding to treatment. So, when I arrived, she said, what shall we do? And we talked about amputating the arm to try and save his life, but I looked at him, and I said his general condition is very, very serious, and I question if he'd come through if we operate. So, we wanted to, but I said, well, the general condition is too serious.

So, we left it for a while, and she went out of the room, and I sat there thinking to myself, well, I don't know if he's going to do this operation or not. And then I saw he was becoming more and more distressed, and I went and lifted him up in my arm, and he died in a few moments in my arm. I laid him back, and I went and called Mrs. Crawford, and she came in and put one of these wooden, the old wooden stethoscope on his breast, and listened and said, I worked all that night to make a coffin.

Never made a coffin in my life before. They made this coffin, and then the Africans said, now we want him to be buried like the Africans. And he himself had said that.

That is, wrapped in a grass mat. So, they said, well, yes, we agree to that, but we must have a coffin as well. So, he was wrapped in the grass mat, as the natives were, and placed in the coffin, and we took him out to the cemetery a little distance out, and we buried him.

It's difficult to believe. He died that evening, he was buried the next morning. It's hard to believe, when we were back in Luanda, that this man was still full of life, was dead, and buried.

Things happen very quickly out there. But the work has gone on. God has overruled, and we moved to the north, and we were able, during 20 years in the Congo, to bring into being many of these African churches.

One could tell you a good deal about them, but there isn't time. Then, after 20 years, because of our children, we had a boy and two girls, they needed education. We came out of the Congo, went away to England, and for a time we did what we could to get them educated, and then back again to Africa.

But then we found that they didn't want to be in the Belgian Congo. They wanted to be in British territories, northern Rhodesia. So, we went into northern Rhodesia to see and get them finished up with schooling, and into some sort of business, and found then that there was no missionary work being done in that area.

We began to move around, and in a very short space of time, we had the first church established. And so we felt, well, the Lord is overruling. We've been in the Congo, we've served in there, we've established those churches, they manage their own affairs, they don't really need me.

I would have gone back, the Lord overruled, and said, no, you stay here. So, we stayed in what is now Zambia, and the Lord opened up the work, and we established a number of churches there. And then when we had finished this work, we came out on furlough, and when we came out it was northern Rhodesia, and when we got back it was Zambia.

They had got independence, and we went back with our passports, and we handed them to the immigration official, an African, and he looked at them and said, who are you? We said, we are returning residents. He said, no, you're not. I said, we've been residents in this country for 20 years.

He said, no, you have not. Oh, I said. He said, you were resident in northern Rhodesia.

I said, well, we were residents in this country, which was at one time called northern Rhodesia, but is now called Zambia, for the same country. Not the same country. You've never been resident in Zambia.

You get out. So we found ourselves out. The Lord overrules.

We wondered, why God overrules? So that in the Congo, we come out, all those churches are still going on, into Zambia. We come out of Zambia, those churches are still going on. Now what do we do? And I realized that the Lord was overruling, and he wanted me to write some books.

So in South Africa, in two and a half years, I wrote five books in the African language, given the ministry, so that whilst we are not there, we are still there. We are not there in certain, but we are there in those books, and they are profiting by the reading of the books. So we thank God for his overruling.

Maybe he still has something for us to do over there, and if so, we've gladly gone back. We've had a year of prayer. I'm clear to that.

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