

INTRODUCTION

Our Scripture reading this morning is taken once again from **The Gospel of Matthew chapter 6 and verses 9-13** as we continue our study of **The Lord's Prayer**. **Matthew chapter 6**, beginning in **verse 9**. Let us now hear God's Word. **(READ)**

A DIFFICULT PETITION

Our Heavenly Father, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

That, of course, is the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, and on the surface, it seems to be the simplest and most understandable. I mean, if a person believes in God wouldn't follow that he or she would not only submit themselves to God's heavenly will, but they'd also long for others on earth to do so as well? But in reality this petition is actually **quite difficult**: To pray genuinely and honestly...**Your will be done**. For when it comes down to it, whose *will* do we really want God to fulfill...his or ours? Isn't it the case that more times than not, what we deeply desire, what we expect and even we ask for isn't for God's will to be done, but for our own will to be done? And because this is so, we often show ourselves to be like the crowds that followed Jesus during his earthly ministry.

For we're told in the Gospels that many people sought Jesus. But why'd they seek him? Well in many respects, it was because they believed Jesus had come to do their will. There he was – healing, helping and comforting. Yet, as soon as he began to speak about God's will in terms of a cross, a cross for him as well as a cross for those who'd follow him, what'd the crowd do? They rejected him. They abandoned him, proving they what they really wanted was a king, a god who existed for their will, rather than seeing themselves as ones who exist for his will. They wanted comfort and ease, while Jesus spoke of self-giving and sacrificial love. They wanted Jesus to crush their enemies, while he proclaimed the Kingdom of God that forgives one's enemies. For as long as Jesus met the crowd's expectations, they were happy, but as soon as he didn't, they were disappointed, and in their disappointment, they turned on him.

And my friends, so often, we do the same. For what do we really want from Jesus? Well, let's go ahead and admit it – we, more times than not, want him to fulfill our will. We want him to ensure our happiness. We want him to make our lives, our marriages, our parenting, and our vocations comfortable and easy. We want health and wealth, security and satisfaction. We want Jesus to fulfill our dreams and our desires. And when he fails to do what we want, (well) we're easily frustrated, and in that frustration we're tempted to turn from him. As **one writer's** said...**We may pray, "Thy will be done," but in fact we're often thinking, "Our will be done," and thus this third petition...is first of all a judgment on us, a judgment on our faith. For this petition is a kind verification of our goals and directions in life: what is that I want, what is it that forms the main and highest value of my life, what is the treasure of my heart?**

And you see, that's the difficulty of this petition, for it forces us to deal with the deepest desires of our hearts. It forces each of us to ask: What do I really desire...my own self-defined way or God's way? My will or his will?

KNOWING GOD'S WILL

But you know, that raises the question...**What is God's will?** Can we even know his will? And here I'm speaking about his eternal and unchangeable will? Well we can, only in so far as he's made it known. Now this doesn't mean we can know his will fully, but we can know it truly.

In other words, we may not be able to discern the inner workings of God's will, of the exact way and the why he's working it out personally and historically, yet we can still know his will, for he's made it known to us in his Word. For in the Scriptures, God's unveiled the mystery of his eternal will and purpose. The Apostle Paul tells us as much in **Ephesians chapter 1** when he writes...**that God lavished his grace upon us, in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, a plan to unite, or sum up, all things in him, things in Heaven and things on earth.** The unveiled mystery of God's eternal will is this: That only in Jesus can humanity and the wider creation 'add up' to what God desired when he willed to create in the beginning.

For in the beginning God's creational purpose was for Heaven and earth (and think here of Heaven as God's space and earth as our space) to be one, for God created Heaven and earth not as two separate entities, but as two sides of one cosmic reality. For God created Heaven and earth to be joined in a sort of cosmic matrimony filled with his presence and peace, his life and love. And in the middle of this matrimony was Adam, the first human being, the human being who was formed in God's image that he and his posterity might more and more grow in God's likeness. For in the beginning God created Adam not as a static creature, as a creature fully formed and developed. No, he created Adam to progress from a state of sinless immaturity to a state of complete sinless maturity. God created Adam to go from glory to glory, to the glory of becoming more and more like God, so that he'd not only be filled with a breath of life, but that he'd filled with the very Spirit of Living God. And central to this maturation process was God's specific command, his Word or Will of Command which called Adam to live in obedience to his Creator, with an obedience that willingly and thankfully acknowledged that...**all that exists is from God, through God and to God.** For if Adam and his posterity were to become the human beings God always had in mind, Adam must submit his will to God's will, to God's word of command, for only in God's will is there the promise of life...life in God and with God, the life of growing more and more in the likeness of God. Now when we put all this together, what does it mean? Well, it means that Adam's obedience to God's will of command, which was expressed in his Word, was integral to Heaven and earth's unity. It was integral to humanity becoming the human beings God always had in mind. And seen in this way, Adam's call to do God's will of obedience was truly a matter of life and death.

And as we know, not only from **Genesis 3**, but from the rest of human history, Adam failed to do God's will. For shortly after God created all things, Adam chose his own will over of God's will, believing that independence rather than faithful dependence was the path to life and happiness, the path of his becoming like God. But, of course, it wasn't. For rather than securing life by doing his own will, Adam thrust himself as well as his posterity, and all of creation for that matter, into death. For in rejecting God's will of obedience, Adam caused a rupture, a rupture between Heaven and earth. For what God created to be joined together, Adam in his sin separated, for through Adam's sin Heaven and earth became estranged. And within this estrangement humans and the wider creation became fractured and fragmented. Humanity was now subject to death and creation was now subject to decay...so that now we make our home in world filled with darkness, disease, disorder. We live in a world presently comprised of confusion and chaos, so much chaos that the world no longer makes sense – personally, relationally, socially, politically or cosmically. Because Adam sought to live for his own self-determined will rather than God's will, all things are now horribly amiss. They no longer add up as God created them to be in the beginning.

Yet here's the wonder, the wonder of God's infinite grace and power: That Adam's rejection of God's will, his will of command for obedience, couldn't ultimately undo God's ultimate purpose, his purpose of having humanity in his image and according to his likeness as well as having Heaven and earth be one.

For God's eternal will is sovereign, so in the mystery of his eternal will...**what Adam meant for evil, God for meant and worked for good.**

Now we wouldn't know this by simply looking at ourselves or our world in its brokenness. No, we can only know this by looking at Jesus, for in Jesus Heaven and earth have met perfectly, for he's God (Heaven) in the flesh (earth). He's the Eternally Divine Son of the Father who, in time, became a human being, the human being God always had in mind. For God's Son became a human so that in him, we might become the human beings God always desired, human beings who find their life and meaning and purpose not in our own self-determined will, but in God's will.

You see, left to ourselves we don't desire God's will. Even more, we're opposed to it, and the reason is, because by birth, we're all connected to Adam who first disobeyed God's will of command. And because we are, we need a Savior, a Divine Savior who's also fully human. Put another way, we need a new Adam, a New Adam who won't reject God's will, which leads to death, but who'll do God's will, which leads to life. And my friends, Jesus is the New Adam, who in every part and in every way, lived according to God's will. For he came into the world to accomplish his Father's eternal will and purpose through his obedience.

And the one place where this becomes crystal clear is in the Garden of Gethsemane. For in that Garden we see Jesus experiencing deep and troubled agony. We see him on his knees praying the very prayer he taught us to pray...**Father, not my will, but your will be done.** And what was he praying about?

Well, he was praying about the fulfillment of God's eternal and cosmic will, his will that could only be fulfilled in Jesus willingly going to the cross. In the Garden, we see Jesus wrestling with the reality that the only way we could become the human beings God destined and desires us to be, the only way Heaven and earth could be joined, is if Jesus, the true human is ripped apart on the cross. For only if he's ripped apart can we be reconciled to God. Only if he's judged for our sin can we be forgiven. Only if he's rejected for our rejection can we can be accepted. Only if he dies the death we deserve for our rebellion against God's will for obedience can we share in the very life of God. The Father's will for Jesus was the cross. And this was a truly overwhelming prospect for Jesus. Yet in that Garden, Jesus didn't shrink back from God's will. Rather he aligned his human will perfectly with the Father, praying...**Father, not my will but your will be done**, proving for all time that he's the first human being in history to do God's will obediently and perfectly, and he did it for us.

For in the original Garden, the first Adam failed and we all suffered, but now in this Garden, the Second Adam, the true human, the Lord Jesus Christ, succeeded, and as result all who trust in him have benefited. For from the Garden, after committing himself decisively to do his Father's will, Jesus willingly and obediently went to the cross where poured out his life for ours. Jesus, the true man who's also the true God, willed our salvation through his obedience. As Paul puts it in **Romans 5...If because of one man's trespass death reigned through that one man, Adam, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.**

And what this means is that in Jesus, we've been given a new start, a new beginning. For in trusting in Jesus we've been put into a new position of having his Father as our Father and having his Spirit living with us so that we might now join our voices with his, declaring gratefully and willingly...**Father in Heaven, may your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.**

Through grace and loving sacrifice we're now God's children and because we are, our calling is to live according to God's will. We're now to learn to live in such a way that our chief aim and ambition would be for our Father's will rather than our will to be done. Or put another way, that our chief aim and ambition, in light of our Father's grace to us in Jesus, would be for our will to align with our Father's will of us becoming human beings who find their joy and glory not in our self-determined will, but in God's will - in the will of his name being honored and his Kingdom coming more and more into our lives.

PRAYING THIS PETITION

And central to this is our learning...[To Pray this petition](#). So what does it mean to pray this petition?

Well, it **first** means praying it...**in faith**. That is, faith in Jesus, in the One who fulfilled God's will for us through the cross. For on the cross, Jesus yielded his life in complete obedience, in loving obedience to his Father on our behalf. As Jesus himself said in **John 6.40...This is my Father's will, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life**. Jesus has done everything necessary for our life and salvation. And because he has, our Heavenly Father's will for us is that we entrust the whole of ourselves to his Son, to the New Adam who's accomplished his Father's will of reconciling humanity to himself. And central to entrusting ourselves to Jesus in faith is our commitment to the cross, our commitment to die, to die to self-absorption and self-exaltation, so that we might live in and reflect God's self-giving love. Seen in the way, praying this third petition means asking the Father to more and more shape our lives by his Spirit that we would more and more be characterized by his Son's cross.

- That the cross, which is the symbol of God's love, would be evident in our words, actions and choices.
- That the cross would shape the way we relate to and speak about others, that the cross would lead us not to demand our rights, but to give up our rights, for we belong to a Savior who gave his rights for our salvation.

To pray this third petition is to echo the Apostle Paul who says in **Galatians 2.20...I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me**. To pray for God's will to be done is to pray that God's love, his cross-shaped love, would be rooted and manifested in us.

Second, praying this petition means praying it...**with repentance**. For none of us have arrived. None of us are yet perfect. We constantly struggle and daily fail to see God's will as best, as the best thing for our lives and our world. And our Father knows this, and that's why he calls again and again to confess our sin and selfishness, and he does so not shame us, but to assure us that when we confess our sins, he's faithful to forgive our sins and self-will on the basis of his Son. To pray...**Your will be done**, means acknowledging all the ways you want your self-centered will to be done, all the ways you seek to be sovereign over your life, so that through that honest acknowledgment you might turn more and more to Jesus who's shown us that God's will isn't against us, but for us. For in Jesus we're able to see that God's will, at all times and in all situations, is for our good...the ultimate good of forming us into a people who don't rely on ourselves or this world, but who rely on our God who is our life and fullness.

Third, praying this petition means praying it...**with our Bibles open**. For when we pray for God's will to be done, we're not blindly committing ourselves to a fatalistic lifestyle. We're not simply shrugging our shoulders and saying...whatever will be will be. No, with this petition comes the call to discern God's will, and the one place we learn to discern God's will is in his Word.

For we can't pray...**Your will be done**, unless we first listen to God say to us in his Word...**This is my will for you**. For it's in the Bible that we hear and discern that God's ultimate will for us is...**to conform us to the image of his Son**, the One in who's image we were made and the One in who's likeness we're to grow. And the way God accomplishes his will of conforming us to the image of his Son is through his Word. For in his Word, God, by his Spirit, shows us his Son. For the Bible, from beginning to end, is a book about Christ...preparing us for Christ and pointing us to Christ, the One who's unveiled the mystery of God's eternal will of having a humanity who lives in and looks like Jesus. For we can't know and grow in God's Jesus-shaped will without a constant immersion in his Word. We could put it this way...the enfleshed Word of God, Jesus, is only enfleshed in us through a continual immersion in his written Word, as we feast on his Word that calls us...**To trust in the Lord with all heart, rather than to lean on our own understanding, so that in all our ways we acknowledge him, trusting that he'll make our paths straight**.

Lastly, praying this petition means praying...**for Jesus' return**. For only at Jesus' return will we see the full beauty of God's eternal will in Christ. Only then, will we be the human beings God always had in mind. For at Jesus' return, we will see Jesus as he is, face to face, and we will be like him, sharing fully in his indestructible life. At the same time, it's only at his return that Heaven and earth will finally be one. For on the Day of his return...**Heaven will come down to earth and God will make his dwelling with us, and in dwelling with us, he'll wipe away every tear from our eyes, for death, the great enemy of humanity, will be no more**. There's a Day coming when God's good will, will indeed be done fully on earth as it is in Heaven. And because that Day is coming we're to live in light of it as we pray not only for that future Day, but as we pray in the present that the life of Heaven would become more visible in our lives now.

CONCLUSION

What a great privilege we've been given to pray this difficult petition! For in Jesus we see that our Father's will is for our good...for our salvation, for our life and for our all, that God himself would be our all in all. For God's will is to give us himself. And he's done this in Jesus and by the Spirit, and he will do it in a way we scarcely imagine at Jesus' return. For God's eternal will and purpose is to flood your life and this world with his glorious presence that makes all things new. For in Christ, he made us and redeemed us for himself, to find and to know him as our all in all. And when this reality grips our hearts it enables us to grasp what Paul says in **I Thessalonians** when he writes...**Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus**.

May our Father's will be done. May this be our prayer now and always.