

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, July 10, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 6:10

10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM #22
THE LORD'S PRAYER: YOUR WILL BE DONE

When I was in seminary, I took a world missions class in which the professor required us to read the book, "Decision Making and the Will of God," by Dr. Gary Friesen. It was one of the most important assignments of my young life, for the principles that Dr. Friesen taught in his book were revolutionary to my understanding of the will of God.

It's not uncommon for college or graduate students to question what God's will is for their life. In fact, questions concerning God's will are a regular part of the discussions that I have with people in my life. Maybe you can relate. Maybe you have questions as to whether or not you are in sync with what God's plan for your life is. You've heard that, "God loves you and has a plan for your life," and maybe you've discovered the fact that He wants you to be His child and to experience the grace and love that He has shown to the world in the form of His son, Jesus Christ, but maybe you are wondering if there is more to this life.

Earlier this year the film, *Soul Surfer*, became a Hollywood hit. It's the story of Bethany Hamilton, who at 13-years-old was a competitive surfer with a promising future. She comes from a home with two godly parents, and with an incredible surfing gift, Bethany and her mother were praying about God's will for her life. Check out her story:

(Soul Surfer video clip – 2:51)

It's a truly amazing perspective. How many 13-year-olds do you know who would have responded the way that Bethany did? How many parents do you know who would respond like Bethany's parents did? What if the will of God for you involved indescribable pain?

What Bethany and her mother did when they prayed for God's will to be revealed for Bethany's life is what God has called each one of us to do. Christians are people who are called to discover and obey God's will for their life. It's something that Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer. Immediately following Jesus instruction to pray that His kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven, was the instruction to pray that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. We see it in Matthew 6:10. 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Martin Luther once called the Lord's Prayer a "fearful prayer," because if we truly knew what we were praying, we would be shaken to the core.¹ Do we really want to know God's will for our lives? Do we really want to see this prayer answered?

How many people have you met in your life who live as if God doesn't matter, who do whatever they wish, who live with absolute disregard for the things of God and then when tragedy strikes, they pray this prayer? There are some theologians who say that the Lord's Prayer is the most misused passage of Scripture in the entire Bible.

Kent Hughes gives a good illustration. He writes, "Hollywood thinks it makes the perfect conclusion to a war movie. You know the story line. 'The Terrible Ten' have been killing the enemy with ferocious joy and cohabitating with the local girls. The only time God has been mentioned is in their curses. But now the enemy has them encircled, their ammo is gone, and the situation is so desperate that they need to do something religious. SO they begin to pray, 'Our Father in heaven . . .' The Lord's Prayer is one of the most abused portions of Scripture in or out of the church. Not only is it abused through mindless repetition but in its being prayed by people who have never had any intention of doing God's will!"²

So, what are we really praying when we ask for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven? There are some who understand God's will the way that this story goes.

As the golfer approached the first tee, a hazardous hole with a green surrounded by water, he debated if he should use his new golf ball. Deciding that the hole was too treacherous, he pulled out an old ball and placed it on the tee. Just then he heard a voice from above say loudly: "Use the new ball!" Frightened, he replaced the old ball with the new one and approached the tee.

Now the voice from above shouted: "Take a practice swing!" With this, the golfer stepped backward and took a swing. Feeling more confident, he approached the tee when the voice again rang out: "Use the old ball!"

The will of God, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.³

I believe that Scripture gives us some great guidelines concerning the will of God. Let me suggest a few truths concerning the will of God.

1) When we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven we are praying that God's overall plan for our life would be fulfilled. Elmer Towns puts it this way, "like a blueprint an architect follows in constructing a building. So you are praying, 'Thy long-

¹ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 175.

² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³ http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/w/will_of_God.htm

range blueprint for my life be done.' You are asking God to build your life as He might construct a building using the plans."⁴

In a country where personal freedom is of utmost value, this idea of allowing God to direct our steps is rather foreign. We like to be in control. I've talked with so many men who have never allowed God to have complete control of their lives. They are so focused on controlling every aspect of their life that they don't want to submit to God's control. It's kind of like the little boy who kept standing in his kindergarten class when the teacher asked the kids to sit down. She finally said to him, "Everyone else is sitting down. Can't you sit down?" When the little boy continued to stand the teacher's assistant put her hand down on the little boy's shoulder and made him sit down. Upset, he shouted out, "I may be sitting on the outside, but I'm standing on the inside!"⁵

Are you ever that way with God? Do you reluctantly follow His direction for your life? Do you put up a fit when He calls you to live in His ways?

Romans 12:1-2 shows us the way that followers of Jesus live:

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

You cannot separate the Lordship of Jesus Christ from the Christian life. It is impossible to do the will of God if He is not Lord. He becomes Lord as we offer our bodies as living sacrifices. When I was a youth pastor I used to preach a message entitled, "Dead Men Walking," about once every two years. It was based on this idea of offering our bodies as living sacrifices to God. Christians are people who die to our own will and seek to live God's will for our lives. That means that we have to constantly separate ourselves from the world's value system. When the world shouts, "Conform, conform, conform!" Christ shouts, "Be transformed, be transformed, be transformed!" How does that transformation happen? It happens when we renew our minds. We need to spend time in His Word. We need to spend time in prayer. Indeed, we need to pray the Lord's Prayer. We need to be people who ask that His will be done on earth (in our lives) as it is in heaven. God has a plan for your life and it will go better for you as you follow the blueprint that He has laid out in Scripture.

Paul expounded upon this truth in Galatians 2:20, where he wrote: 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

⁴ Elmer Towns, *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough*, (Ventura: CA: Regal Books, 1997), p. 94.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

We're never going to be able to live a life that honors God if we don't understand what His will is concerning us. So, where do we find God's will?

a) We find God's will in His written Word.

In Psalm 119:105-106 we read, "105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. 106 I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws."

The Bible is God's Word revealed to us. It is the written revelation of God to men and women for all time. When tempted to embrace an ideology of the world, check it with Scripture. Ask yourself, "Is what I am being told consistent with what God's word says?" If it isn't, then renew your mind with what is true. Follow the blueprint. Recognize that God's plan for our life cannot be fulfilled if we are living a life that is contrary to what His Word teaches.

In the Westminster Confession of Faith we read:

"The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at anytime is to be added whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of man."

b) We find God's will in the irreducible core of the Christian faith.

We've talked about the irreducible core a lot at Woodbury Community Church. When we strip away everything that we've been taught about being a Christian and boil it down to that which matters most to God, what is it? In the Great Commandment we are told in Matthew 22:34-40, that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. So we accomplish God's will by loving Him with everything in our being. He is our greatest desire. His fame is more important than ours. His name is worthy of praise. He is our everything! We love others more than we love ourselves. We place a high priority on humanity because our fellow human beings are created with infinite worth and value in the image of God. That means that we love the difficult people in our lives. It means that we love those who disagree with us. It means that we love people from other religions. It means that we love people who hate us. It means that we love people who hate Jesus. It means that we love people who might cause us harm. Is it easy? No! But, it is the Jesus way.

There is a third part of the irreducible core of the Christian faith, and that is found in Matthew 28:18-20 in a passage we know as the Great Commission. It is in this passage that God reveals His desire that we go and make disciples. So, praying that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven requires that you be involved in at least three things. You can be 100% sure that God's blueprint for your life involves you loving Him more than anything else on earth. It involves loving others more than you love yourself. It involves making disciples.

I was reading our Challenge reading yesterday, and we've begun the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 1, Isaiah begins to prophecy against the nation of Judah. Judah has rebelled against God. They have substituted God's precepts for their own ways. In Isaiah 1:10-20 we see God issuing a stern warning to the people, comparing them to the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which He destroyed many years before. Listen to these words:

10 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! 11 "The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. 12 When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? 13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. 14 Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; 16 wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, 17 learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. 18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; 20 but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

We love to talk about the love of God, but God is also a God of wrath. No wonder Martin Luther called the Lord's Prayer a fearful prayer. There is gravity to the words of this prayer. We must take seriously the high and holy calling that God has given us to follow His will.

2) There is a second truth concerning God's will that I want you to understand today. When we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven we are praying for the present time, but we are also praying for the future day in which there will be universal obedience to God's will. Hughes writes, "In the final kingdom there will be no necessity for guidelines about divorce, retaliation, hate, lust or hypocrisy because there will be no divorce or hatred or hypocrisy. God's will will prevail everywhere. 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' focuses on this final inevitable event and fills us with hope in this rebellious world.

(Second) the prayer calls for God's will to be done right now in present history. To those who question who this is possible, Jesus answers with his life. Early in his ministry Jesus told his disciples, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me' (John 4:34). If I pray this petition rightly, my food what I really live for – is not an extra dessert or a bit of religion to

decorate my life, but doing God's will. . . Later Jesus again said, "I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30). And yet again in John's Gospel, 'I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me' (6:38). And in Gethsemane, in the midst of bloody sweat, he cried to his Father, 'Abba Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will' (Mark 14:36).

We are to emulate our Lord's example. It is possible for men and women, despite their imperfections, to experience the working out of God's will. We are to pray that this will happen not only in regard to salvation, but so righteousness and justice will be brought about in this fallen world."⁶

3) There is a third truth concerning God's will that I want you to understand today. When we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven we are trusting in God's decision making ability. Elmer Towns writes, "You are asking God to guide your decisions by His decision-making ability. In the middle of a battle, the commander will make a series of decisions to deploy troops, mover artillery and provide supplies. The commander has an overall plan or strategy. That's the 'Big Picture.' The commander also makes daily decisions. This is how he guides his troops to victory. So when you pray, 'Thy will be done,' you are asking for God's decisions to be effective in your life based on His ability to see the 'big picture'; and you are asking for His guidance in your life for the problems of that day."⁷

It's a great picture of how God works in the lives of His children. He wants to guide us in the decision making process. We've already seen how He does that through His word, and in the irreducible core of the Christian faith. He works through other Christians as well as our brothers and sisters share God's truth with us. But, we have to respond to God's calling on our lives. We have to choose whether or not we are going to allow His will to be accomplished in our lives. And, that is where so many of us fall short. Listen, there is a "on earth as it is in heaven" part to this prayer. Kent Hughes writes, "It is (also) possible to say 'your will be done' with a note of cheer and buoyancy, for we know that is the way it is in Heaven! The glorified saints and angels find their greatest joy in doing God's will. They probably do it with singing, judging by the heavenly vignettes in the book of Revelation."⁸

This past week our family had the opportunity to vacation in Door County, Wisconsin with Steve and Diane Olson from church. Steve owns a fishing boat that he docks in Door County. He is an avid salmon fisherman and offered to take our family fishing for salmon on Lake Michigan for two consecutive days. The weather could not have been better. For two glorious days some of us were up at 3:30 AM to be at the dock by 4 AM for the morning fishing, and then back at the dock by 4 PM for the evening fishing. None of us had ever been salmon fishing. I'd never even been on a boat like the one that Steve fishes from. It was a joy to watch my children as Steve gave instructions on how to let out the

⁶ Hughes, p. 176.

⁷ Towns, p. 94.

⁸ Hughes, pp. 177-178.

fishing line, or how to bring the giant fish onto the boat. Their eyes lit up as they followed Steve's instructions and brought the salmon in. Things went well on that boat when we submitted to the expertise and the authority of our ship's captain. It's the same way in life.

One of the common misperceptions that Christians have about God's will is that it is restrictive and takes the fun out of life. I think it's just the opposite. Understanding God's will brings incredible freedom. When I was in seminary and read Friesen's book "Decision Making and the Will of God," I was looking for that dot in the center of God's will. I thought if I somehow deviated from the dot, I was living in sin. What I found out was that God has a specific will and a permissive will. His specific will is laid out in the commands and precepts of Scripture. That which He calls sin is to be avoided. That which He calls righteousness is to be pursued. But His permissive will allows for our free will. Someone once said, "If it pleases you to please God you may do as you please." In other words if you are pursuing the things that bring honor and glory to God, then there is freedom in what you will do with your life. There is freedom in where you live, who you choose for a mate, how you spend your time.

The bottom line is this: when we ask for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are asking God to move the world to universal obedience (which will not happen until the end of history), and to move Christians towards obedience today. This means that we are asking that God's will would be the supreme desire in our lives and that our obedience would be as it is in heaven - joyful and enthusiastic.

Kent Crockett has written, "People wrestle with God for one of two reasons:

1. They don't know God's will and are trying to find it.
2. They know God's will and are trying to decide whether or not to do it."⁹

My guess is that many of us here may be wrestling with God today. We either don't know his will and are trying to find it or are trying to decide whether to do it or not. My bet would be that if you are like me, there is at least one area that you need to surrender to Christ today. As we close today, I'd like you to finish this statement in your sermon notes.

God, right now I commit to _____. May your will be done in my life as it is in heaven – joyful and enthusiastic!

I want to close with these words, which for many of you are your life's verses. Proverbs 3:5, 6 says, "5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

May that be the prayer of your heart this morning!

⁹ http://www.kentcrockett.com/cgi-bin/illustrations/index.cgi?topic=God_s%20Will