

Bethany Presbyterian Church

11 March 2018

Luke 22:42

God of the prophets, God of consuming fire, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: in your covenant faithfulness, send forth the fire of your Holy Spirit to accompany the reading and hearing of your Holy Word; that your truth and righteousness may be emblazoned upon our hearts. Set our souls on fire with a holy passion, that we may offer ourselves as living sacrifices of obedience and praise to you, the one and only True and living God; through Jesus Christ who is our eternal prophet, priest, and king. Amen.

IN GETHSEMANE

Jesus taught his disciples in the model prayer to pray, "Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). And he observed his own teaching in his life. One of the great and significant events in the life of our Lord was his experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed on the night before his crucifixion, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). He had taken with him into the garden the three disciples who were of the inner circle (Peter, John, and James) and said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death, remain here, and watch with me" (v. 38). They soon fell asleep as he prayed; so he aroused them and said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (vv. 40, 41). Then he went aside and prayed again, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (v. 42). He prayed this same prayer a third time. Mark gives a similar account, where he tells us that Jesus "began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:33-36). The rest of Mark's account is almost exactly like that of Matthew. Luke adds a few more

details, saying that Jesus "knelt down" and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Luke says that angels appeared from heaven and strengthened him, and then adds, "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (v. 44). John does not give us a similar account, although he said that Jesus prayed shortly before this event, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name" (John 12:27). God answered, saying, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (v. 28).

The New Testament plainly teaches that Jesus always lived by God's will and practiced what he had said, "Pray then like this... Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9, 10).

Jesus said that he came to earth to do the Father's will: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). The writer of Hebrews applied these Old Testament words to Jesus, "'Lo, I have come to do your will, O God,' as it is written of me in the roll of the book" (Hebrew 10:7). Doing God's will meant accomplishing God's work. Jesus said to his disciples, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). Doing God's will satisfied Jesus more than food for his body. He said to his disciples, "I have food to eat of which you do not know" (v. 32). He had just won a sinful woman to discipleship and had given her the living water that would refresh her forevermore. Jesus came to this planet to carry out in detail the plan and wish and will of his Father in heaven. That will included teaching, preaching, healing, helping, and providing salvation by his atoning

death on Calvary and his resurrection from the dead. Just before healing a blind man Jesus said to the twelve, "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work" (John 9:4). Later he prayed, "I glorify you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Doing God's will meant pleasing God in everything. Previously he said to his enemies and critics, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know I am he, and I do nothing on my own authority but speak as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:28, 29). Jesus learned God's will as he prayed, for the Father taught him and was always present to guide him in the performance of the divine will. That he pleased God and did his will in everything is shown by God's words at his baptism and his transfiguration. On the first occasion God spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). On the next occasion he spoke exactly the same words and added, "Listen to him" (Matthew 17:5).

God's will and the will of Jesus were the same. There was perfect unity and harmony. Jesus said, "I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 5:30). He sought God's will, even as we must seek it, by prayer and a reverent study of the Holy Bible. In his prayers in Gethsemane he was not seeking to change God's will but to conform to it. That is the wonderful secret of great praying: conformity to the divine will in everything.

Jesus' desire to conform to God's will made him completely unselfish and obedient. He never followed the easy way of personal comfort or freedom from pain and cruel

suffering. The devil tempted him to do so, but he was victorious over Satan. Of course Jesus dreaded suffering, and yet he saw joy set before him and glorious victory in the magnetism of his coming cross. His complete dedication to God led him to lay aside his own personal desires and bring them into accord with the desires of his Father. In doing God's will, Jesus could say, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). There is no conflict; Jesus wanted what God wanted and was ready to give his all to carry out the will of God who had sent him to earth to do this very thing.

Jesus plainly tells us some things that are God's will. Some of these he learned as he prayed. It is not God's will that anyone should perish. "So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:14). We can be confident that it is God's will that all his children should be saved. Jesus said that we are not to hinder the little children from coming to him "for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). It is not God's wish or will that suffering or death should come to any little child. He permits it, but he does not will it.

It is not God's will that Jesus should lose any of those God has given him. Our Lord said this quite precisely. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given Me, but raise it up at the last day" (John 6:38, 39). He prayed that God would keep in his name all the Father had given to the Son, even as the Son kept and guarded them. Only one – Judas Iscariot – perished, and that was because he insisted on having his own selfish will accomplished rather than the will of God. No one can snatch the true Christian from the hand of the Savior or from the hand of the Father.

It is God's expressed will that every believer should have eternal life and be raised from the dead. Our Lord said, "For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (v. 40). We must behold Jesus, the Son of God, upon his cross and risen from the dead and upon his throne. We must believe in him personally and sincerely, trusting him, surrendering to him, committing ourselves to him and obeying him. It is always God's will that those who do this be saved. Peter understood this when he said, "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (II Peter 3:9). Jesus said, "do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28, 29).

It is God's will that his Kingdom come on earth and that his will be done here and now just as it is done in heaven. God plans to make all things new, including heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1).

Jesus saw glorious results from doing God's will. We enter God's kingdom by doing his will. Jesus declared, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). We become spiritually akin to Jesus by doing God's will. Our Savior said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:49, 50). We join God's family by doing the will of the heavenly Father. Our obedience is the sign of our belonging.

Doing God's will enables us to understand the teachings of Jesus, who said, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (John 7:16, 17). If we are really seeking to do God's will, we will be able to recognize the source of divine truth. We recognize Jesus as "a teacher come from God" (John 3:2) and one who has the words of eternal life. Our Lord said, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). The Son chooses to reveal God to all who come to him in faith and take his yoke and learn of him.

The early Christians learned what the will of God was as they listened to Jesus and sought to follow him. James, the Lord's brother, wrote, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain'; you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that'" (James 4:13-14). Paul always sought to know and follow the Lord's will. He wrote to the Corinthians, saying, "But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills" (I Corinthians 4:19). To the Thessalonians he wrote, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (I Thessalonians 4:3).

I John says: "And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (I John 2:17). He also said: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence we have in him, if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we

know he hears us in whatever we ask, we know we have obtained the requests made of him" (I John 5:13-15).

Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but yours, be done" and this was his lifelong prayer. It should be the constant prayer of every Christian, for Tennyson was right when he wrote: "Our wills are yours to make them Thine."

Let Us Pray

O God of history and God of love, whose Son Jesus died on a cross and was raised from the dead, we wait before you in the excitement of Easter Day as those who would die to their sins and be brought to newness of life in him. Lower into the grave all selfishness, greed, and envy, all harmful desires and unworthy ambitions, and make to rise, as if by a miracle, the good in our hearts, the love we bear to other persons, and the wish we nourish to make the world a better place. As blossoms open in the springtime, confirming the continuity of life in the world of nature, bring flowering and openness to our personalities, that we may readily share ourselves and our possessions with one another, and participate even now in the kingdom that will know no end. Teach us to regard each day the hundreds of opportunities to see your presence in the people and places around us, and to live with joy and hope from moment to moment, as though this life were heaven itself. Make us channels of blessing and fulfillment for all the poor and unredeemed persons of the earth. And may the power that overcame death in the Lord Jesus at last overcome it completely in us as well, that we may rejoice with the saints in all the ages, and proclaim your love eternally, time without end, through him who taught us to pray: "Our Father ... Amen."