

THE DIVINE WILL

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" Matthew 6:10.

One day when Christ Jesus was here in the flesh, He gave Himself to a season of prayer, and one who heard Him was so moved that he made the request, "Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples." The Master gave the model prayer, one sentence of which indicates the most important prayer for us to pray: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

God has a will. "Born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" John 1:13. "That good and acceptable and perfect will of God" I Corinthians 1:1. God's will determines His actions. The universe everywhere presents the impress of His will.

God has a will concerning man. What a glorious truth that insignificant man engages the mind and heart of God. God has a plan for every life. He has a pattern for every character. He has an ideal for every soul. To make His will known and to get it accomplished has always been the biggest undertaking of God.

God's will came first in the life of Christ. Our Saviour saw to it that His life conformed to God's plan for it. He wanted the Father's will to be done, regardless of what that will was. He was obedient to the will of the Father in everything. To do the will of God was His biggest business. Satan wanted Him to do something else. He offered Him pay and power to substitute something else—sense, sentiment, sensation, or something.

No petition in the Lord's Prayer is so frequently used, and none so misused, as this. It was often found on the lips of Christ. It served Him as the one clear utterance of His need in the hour of His greatest crisis, the one He spent in Gethsemane. "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done," is the prayer that echoes through the solemn stillness of the garden of shadows. Christ rejoiced in the privilege of doing the Father's will. On one occasion He said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me" John 6:38.

Nature obeys God's will. The flower that blooms in the garden or meadow; the lark that sings its way up to heaven's gate in the spring sunshine; the rivers that roll toward the sea; the ocean with its regular ebb and flow; the sun and moon and the stars travelling along their appointed orbits—all these are what they are, and do what they do in obedience to God's will. The wind is God's messenger; the thunder is His voice; the lightning is His sword. Nature obeys God. The angels also cheerfully and lovingly do God's pleasure.

Is there anyone then who resists God's will? Yes, there is one, just one, and that is man. In all God's universe man is the only one who is disobedient. He is the only one invested with the power of resisting, thwarting, or opposing the will of God. And he possesses that awful power because he has a free and independent will of his own. He can either obey or disobey.

This petition teaches us that it must be our supreme desire that God may have His way with us. It is infinitely more important that God's will should be done than that we should have the things upon which we have set our hearts.

What is the meaning of this prayer? It is that we should pray that God may have His way with us here in this world even as He does with the hosts who are in the heavenly

world. We have not learned to pray aright until every petition in our prayers is made subject to this one; until it becomes our chief and supreme desire that God's will may be done.

We are to pray this prayer with the conviction that we have not fully done the will of God. This is true of us individually. How much ugliness in our lives that would be impossible if we had not resisted the will of God! How much of beauty and of strength and of joy would be there if we had only lived all our yesterdays within that perfect will! God is constantly willing something for us that is so marvelously worthwhile, while we are constantly rejecting it to choose the all-but-worthless.

The will we are asked to make our own is our Father's will. After all, it ought not to be very difficult to obey a father's will, to fulfil a father's desire, even when that will runs counter to our own, for we know there is love in the case. Remember, you are not asked to obey a despot; you are not asked to obey a tyrant; you are not asked to obey a slave-driver; you are asked to do the will of your Father, whose love is only to be measured by the cross of Jesus Christ. It was the remembrance that the will He was called upon to obey was His Father's will that helped Him in the Garden. It was not easy for our Lord to say "Thy will be done," when He knew that involved the cross and the grave.

God's will ever seeks our highest good. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." I Thessalonians 4:3. Whatever our lives may be, God's will for us is to make us like Christ. Never lose sight of that for a moment, through whatever hard way life may be leading you. Can you see this will of God without loving it, without desiring it, without your whole being going out towards it as the real ambition of life? Can you see anything greater in life or any greater way of looking at life than just to realize that you have some part to play in this great purpose, some contribution to make to it?

We are to pray this prayer with eager desire. We are to yearn above all else that the will of God may be done. We are to long for God to have His way with us, with our loved ones, with our friends, with our church, and with our world. Now really to desire the will of God is not always easy. Christ Himself did not find it so. At one time He faced the will of God for Himself with all the natural shrinking of a man of fine and sensitive soul. As He looked toward the cross with its desertion, with its shame, with its bitter physical and spiritual agony, He was filled with a terrible dread. In substance He prayed, "Father, if it be possible, if there is any other way, let this cup pass from Me." And then He came back to this, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done." Why did He choose the will of God in spite of the fact that it meant suffering? He did so because He knew it was the will of One who loves with an infinite love, and who, therefore, always seeks our highest good.

Obedience to the will of God is the best proof of our love. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." Obedience is better than sacrifice. God knows the ability of His children and His requests will never go beyond their ability. Because His requests are reasonable and right, a loving, obedient Christian should never hesitate to yield complete obedience to God.

"Thy will be done!" This petition calls our attention to the most crying and urgent need of our day, the need of simpler and more implicit obedience. It is not more knowledge of God's will that we want, but grace to put into practice what we know. What is the use of coming here to hear God's will declared if tomorrow we deliberately

flout and reject it? If tomorrow and on the following days we only did what our Lord desires us to do, we would revolutionize the life of this town.

When we pray, "Thy will be done," what is the attitude we too often have? Is it not merely a kind of pious resignation to a dark fate which we cannot avert? A calamity comes to us. It may be our health is broken, or we meet some staggering loss, or in some way our plans are broken, and we try to submit to it without too much complaining and conclude that it is the fitting time to pray "Thy will be done."

It may be God's will for us to be sick for awhile. Very well, His will be done. It may be His will for us to travel the dark, rough way of adversity for awhile instead of the way of prosperity. Very well, His will be done. Hezekiah traveled the road of adversity and in talking to the Lord about adversity said, "O Lord, by these things men live."

What a challenge this prayer is to us! "Thy will be done." Whatever it is; wherever it leads; whatever it costs; whatever it means! Thy will be done. If it means a season of trial, of adversity, of pain, of suffering, of fear—very well, Father, Thy will be done. If it means broken plans, blasted prospects, faded hopes and disappointed expectations, Thy will be done. It is the most difficult challenge that the soul ever faced. To pray this prayer without evasion or reservation is a real test of Christian character. Can you pray it?

Let us ever remember that His will is always best for us, whatever it is. God's will for us is not only right because it is His will, but it is best, for He dealeth with us from the standpoint of mercy and grace and love. His will is always best. Stonewall Jackson, the great Christian soldier, was wounded accidentally by one of his own men. As he lay dying at the battle of Chancellorsville, he said: "If I live it will be for the best; if I die it will be for the best. God knows and directs all things for the best for His children. God's will be done." That is exactly the way to pray.

If resignation be your only attitude to the will of God, your life will be sorely wanting in delightful strength and beauty. The will of God is not always something burdensome which we have to bear; it is something glorious which we have to do. And therefore we are not to stand before it as mourners only, humbly making our submission, but as keen and eager knights gladly receiving our commissions. The will of God is not always associated with deprivation; it is more commonly associated with a trust. It is not something withheld; it is something given. And there is a ringing challenge in it. Therefore, the symbol of our relation to the will of God is not that of the bowed head, but that of happy servants delighted with their tasks. The will of God is not just something to be endured, but rather it is something to be done. The prayer is not, "Help us to suffer Thy Will, but "Help us to do Thy will." This is not a prayer simply for our times of trouble and our days of deep distress; it is a prayer for all times and for every day. This is not a prayer simply for the invalid and the mourner and the bereaved; it is a prayer also for those who are happy and well and strong. It is not every day, nor every month, nor even every year, that we are called upon to suffer God's will, but there is not a day, nor an hour, that we are not called upon to do His will.

The doing of God's will is a daily and hourly endeavor. And in that regard heaven supplies the pattern for earth. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." How is God's will done in heaven? It is done cheerfully. Angels find their highest joy in doing God's will. Can you say, "I delight to do Thy will, O Lord."? In heaven His will is done whole-heartedly. We shall never do the will of God until we see it as Christ saw it, namely, as the one glorious ambition and purpose of life.

Make this prayer a personal one, as you say, "Let Thy will be done in me." "Father, let Thy will be done in me and through me. Whatever it means; wherever it leads; whether by life or by death; Thy will be done".