

Thy Will Be Done

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We have the delight this morning of returning to our study of the Sermon on the Mount after breaking away from that to do a few topical things for a few weeks of different matters and now we come back to our Lord's words on the Sermon on the Mount and I'm delighted to be back there because I know that what we have ahead for us in chapter 6 especially, is going to be of profound significance for those who will hear and heed and this is a chapter that in my own life surpasses most in the Bible in terms of the direct impact that it has had on my walk with Christ and my understanding and putting so many things to rest in my mind and so I'm delighted to look ahead to this with you anticipating and praying that the Lord will do a work in our church and in your lives individually with what lies ahead. You know, Scripture says that the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division is between soul and spirit of bones and marrow in Hebrews 4, and what we're going to see today, I believe is going to see is going to have that kind of examining spirit, that ability to open up your heart and to have you contemplate in your own soul very fundamental aspects about why it is that you approach God in prayer.

We are in the middle of the Lord's prayer, Matthew 6, beginning in verse 9. Let me read these verses, although we are only going to focus on verse 10 here this morning. Matthew 6:9-15.

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.' 14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Now, just by way of a little bit of review and kind of getting everybody's mind back into the flow of the Sermon on the Mount here and particularly in the Lord's prayer, I am a mindful that many of you perhaps have come out of liturgical backgrounds where the Lord's prayer was recited on a weekly basis and you could just recite it in your sleep and

probably put as much thought into it as you did. That's one of the problems with repetition in worship, it becomes too familiar and you stop thinking about what you're saying. What I want you to see and to just kind of awaken your mind and re-examine something fundamental here is that as familiar as the Lord's prayer is to us, he was not giving it to us so that it would just be something that we mindlessly repeated day after day or week after week, there is profound meaning built into every word that it says. And you can know that it was not intended to be mindlessly repeated by what he had just said two verses earlier in verse 7 when he said, "when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

So we must come to grips immediately with the realization and the understanding that this was not given by the Lord to be something that we just quote back to him without thinking about it. You can see by the contrast, don't use meaningless repetition. There is meaning involved in this prayer and that's what we want to get to and what the Lord teaches us that is so contrary to the natural bent of our fallen hearts, he teaches us to put the interest of God ahead of our own.

First of all, he says, look at it there in verse 9, he says, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.'" The very thrust of this prayer in the first three petitions that are given is an orientation toward the glory of God and the glory of God, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, the glory in God is designed to be your first and your ultimate priority in prayer, not what's happening with you in an earthly sense, not first of all barging into the presence of God and saying, "God, I've got a problem here. Can you please fix it for me?" No, we are to realize the comparative stations in the universe that we hold as we pray. God is high and lofty, the Creator, the Eternal One, the Uncreated One. We are creatures fallen, sinful, dependent on him for our every breath so that that affects the fundamental spirit in which we pray; that as we come to God in prayer, we come seeking as the ultimate priority of a heart of worship, "God, I am here seeking your glory. I am seeking your kingdom. I am here to advance your interests, not my own."

That's the way that we pray. That is the spirit that the Lord taught us and that has a sanctifying influence on your heart. It teaches your heart to learn to put yourself in second place, in third place, to defer to the greater glory of God, the greater purposes of God, and realize that you're a part of a greater whole of what God is doing and that the goal of your heart, the supreme affection of your heart, is not that God would fix you or fix your problem, perhaps God would use your problem to advance his purposes. Rather, the first goal, the first priority of your heart, is the glory of God. Scripture says very clearly in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Well, included in that is the way that you pray and your fundamental mindset toward prayer. Many of us just need a complete reorientation by the Lord of why we do what we do, particularly when it comes to falling on our knees before him, as it were. Prayer

extends the basic purpose of salvation. It is designed to extend the glory of God, first of all. We'll see in coming weeks that God allows and provides for us to bring our petitions before him, but beloved, here's the point for this morning: that is not first. That is a reversal of order. We come and we have a settled mindset in prayer, "God, the purpose here is for me to seek your glory. I am here to serve and to seek your glory rather than my own ease and comfort." Well, that turns the world upside down for many Christians just to hear and recognize that little bit.

Well, embedded in this, the Lord says, "Hallowed be Your name. Father, I seek your praise and glory to be known on the earth. Your kingdom come. God, I look forward to the return of Christ. I pray that you would hasten that day and in the meantime, I pray that you would extend your kingdom through the proclamation of the Gospel and that souls that are currently in darkness would come to Christ in order to be saved. Your kingdom come, Lord, that's what I want." And think about it, beloved, we really do, and I say this, you and I, this is what we need to do, we just need to recognize that when it comes to comparative priorities, the kingdom of God and the glory of God is far more important than you and me. What God wants is more important than what we want because he is more important than we are. I'm trying to make this really plain and simple but we need to let that inform the way that we approach him. God does not exist simply to advance your purposes in life and to make life easy and pleasant for you. That is not the point. God doesn't even exist simply to make sure that all of your family members come to the saving knowledge of Christ. Maybe they will, maybe they won't, it's appropriate for us to pray for that but God's interest transcends us, God's purpose transcends us, God's glory is greater than our ambitions on earth and we must understand that if we ever hope to have any kind of proper spirit before him in prayer. This is very fundamental.

Now, our text for this morning will help us further that and see that in two simple ways. Look at verse 10 with me again, Matthew 6:10. This whole prayer is a command. Jesus said, "Pray in this way. It is a divine imperative from our Lord where our Lord speaking to us as his disciples says, 'It is my will and I am exercising my volition upon yours.'" This is how you are to approach prayer. This is not optional. This is not, "Well, you know, you can take this or leave it and if you want to pray differently, you can," and pray with different priorities you can. The Lord has exempted that. He has excluded that from consideration. He says speaking as our authoritative Lord, our Master and Teacher to whom we say, "Lord, what would you have me do?" That Lord says, "I want you to pray like this, 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Father, Your kingdom come.'" And now in verse 10 he furthers his command to us in prayer when he says you are to pray this way, "Father, Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." The original language, the order is different and it doesn't read as well in English but it's very telling. The idea in the original language is, "Thy will be done as in heaven, so also upon earth." That's the sequence in the original text and so there is the sense of which you are saying, "God, I recognize that in heaven around your throne where the cherubim and seraphim fall and cry out, 'Holy, holy, holy,' and are ready to do your every bidding without delay, Father, in that spirit of heaven where your will is honored and fully obeyed by everyone, just like it is up there, O God, that's what I desire to see happen on earth. Father, I realize that I'm living in a fallen world that is in rebellion against you. I live among a people of unclean

lips and, Lord, the truth be known, I am a man of unclean lips and unclean thoughts myself. And there is this remnant of fallenness even amongst your people to say nothing about the blatant rebellion against you in the world. Lord, when I look up into heaven, as it were, through Scripture and I see your word and your will being done and honored, God, I wish everywhere was like that because that would be sweet, that is when you would be glorified, that is when you would be receiving the honor and glory which is your due. But Father, I recognize that it's not like that and so that's why I pray that you would exercise your power so that your will would be furthered in all that is said and done." That's kind of the spirit of this particular request. This prayer seeks to mirror the attitude in heaven and to bring it down on earth.

Beloved, in light of that, let me give you a sentence that I hope, trust that for some of you will rock your world, will be an 8.0 earthquake under your spiritual foundations because I rather believe that some of us need that. You pray, beloved, the purpose of prayer is not for you to change the will of God, the purpose of prayer is for you to submit to the will of God. Why as a Christian would you want God to change his will when you already know that his will is good and acceptable and perfect? Why would you ever pray for God to do something differently than what he has already planned? That wouldn't make any sense. We have to think about these things and we have to just go to the unpleasant parts of our carnality and bring them out and expose them to the light. Think about it, beloved, here you are – and I am speaking to encourage you and I speak to you as one of like human flesh and like human passions – here you and I are as creatures, finite, limited and our minds distorted by sin and we go and we pray to God who is infinite, uncreated, eternal, surpassing in wisdom, omniscient of all things past, present and future, and fully omnipotent to carry out his will, and he's greater than we are, right? He's better than we are. He knows more than we do. How could it possibly be that the purpose of you and I going to prayer would be to instruct God on the future course that he ought to take in things? That doesn't make any sense. That would be foolish for us to have such a high view of our understanding and our opinions and our view of the future, to have such a high view of us that we go and try to dictate to God the way the world should go. That's foolishness. Yes, we make our requests known to God, yes, we bring these things to him, but there is underlying that and there is preceding that a fundamental deference to the will of God.

So I will say it again: you pray as you look to the future, not to change God's will, but to submit to it. And there are a couple of aspects to this that I want to bring out for you. We'll do well to remember this and we've seen this in our studies on Tuesday evenings in times gone by as we have done our studies on systematic theology. I invite you to come again on Tuesday as we consider Satan and the matter of demons over the next two weeks. But we would do well to recall that God's will has two dimensions to it. There are two aspects that we need to think about God's will if we're going to understand this prayer. God has what we could call his secret will or his decreed will, and God also has his moral will, and they are obviously distinct as I will remind you later on in the message.

God's secret will, as we are calling it here today, has the sense to it: God's secret will refers to his decree made before the beginning of time by which he determined everything that would happen in the universe. We've studied that. Ephesians 1:11 says, "God works all things according to the counsel of His own will." So God had a plan for creation before he spoke it into existence and now he is carrying that plan out in operation in time. God's secret will refers to his decree by which he determines everything that will happen in the universe. We aren't privy to all of that but God knows his will. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to God, the things revealed belong to us." There is an aspect of his will that he has not revealed to us and it is in that realm that we find him working out everything that ever happens and according to that will, God's secret will.

There's another aspect. You can think about God's will from another aspect and you can think about it as God's moral will. His moral will refers to those biblical commands by which he has commanded us what we shall be and what we shall do, what we shall not be and what we shall not do. You think about the 10 Commandments, "You shall love the Lord your God and worship him alone. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not covet," 3 of the 10 there. That's what we mean by God's moral will. When you open the Bible and read it and study it, beloved, you find what God's commanded will is for your life. He exercises his will through his word and says, "This is how men shall be. This is how they shall think. This is what they shall do. This is how they shall even speak." It is comprehensive what God has revealed his moral will to be.

So we have two aspects to God's will and that distinction, I believe, helps us see the significance of this verse in what we are studying here this morning. Now this becomes all very practical, very searching in your hearts with what we are about to do. What is Jesus teaching us when he commands us to pray this way, "Father, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? What is the spirit of that? What are we doing when we pray that way? Let me give you two points based on the distinction in God's will that I just explained to you.

The first point four this morning, this idea of, "Thy will be done," what does that teach you? First of all, it teaches you: to trust in God's secret will. To trust in God's secret will and let me start with just a generic example. We all know what it's like to have sudden problems or unexpected things come into our lives. Didn't want it, life has changed, doors have been closed and everything that you had your heart set on is suddenly gone. Maybe you lose a loved one unexpectedly or an unexpected financial reversal comes that redirects everything that you had planned on and you are in the middle of trying to process that. Well, some panic and wonder what's going to happen and start to wring their hands and wonder what's going to happen next. Or others complain and murmur, "Why does God allow this? What did I ever do? I've tried to be a good person and now look at what's happening to me." Resentment or fear, you get the idea. Well, beloved, what this prayer, "Thy will be done," when you understand it and embrace it, is that it immediately gives you a solid reference point for those times in life so that when you are overwhelmed and a wave has suddenly unexpectedly covered you and crashed you into the beach and you don't know what has happened, you have fallen down and you are

disoriented and you don't know what to do, this is the place where you go, my friends. You look at this and say, "I know immediately where my mind should go in this. Father, whatever else happens here, Father, Thy will be done. Father, I trust you even as my world falls apart around me." That's the idea. Trust in God's secret will, trust in the outworking of his providence, you might say.

As I said earlier, we find God's secret will taught in Ephesians 1:11, "God works all things according to the counsel of His will." All things according to the counsel of his will and so, beloved, you must start your spiritual thinking right here. In all of the legitimate sorrows and difficulties that are represented in this room, we all must come to this point where we recognize this fundamental premise: God is working out his will in absolutely everything that happens, and if you know God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he has his hand on every detail of your life, even if you don't understand, even if you are confused, and even especially when it hurts. You come back and say, "Lord, I'm not going to assess this solely by what I see. I realize that a wise and sovereign God is working out all things. Sometimes that will bring sorrow and pain into my life and, Father, recognizing that this situation is an application of that general principle, what can I say, Father, except Thy will be done?" God is orchestrating human history to accomplish his plan. God is working in every detail of your life if you are a Christian to produce a final result, to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ, that you would be presented to him before God holy and without blame.

Well look, as Christ walked through this life, he walked a road of sorrow. Christ walked the road of pain. Christ knew what it was like to sigh and to groan in the midst of the stupidity and opposition and stubbornness of men. Would we really think that God would, having done that with his own Son, that God would perfect us through a different pattern that was all roses and cream? No, no, we recognize that sometimes God's will includes difficulty for our lives and the question becomes when those difficulties come in your heart, beloved, when they come in your life, the question becomes how then do you respond. That's the point. That's the issue. It's more fundamentally important how you respond than what the circumstances may be vis-à-vis God. And God's secret will covers everything in life and you view life from this grand perspective expressed in Romans 8:28 that says we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose, to those who love God.

So beloved, here's what you see, and how I would love to just somehow supernaturally be able to implant this in the affections of everyone who ever heard me teach, but that's not possible so you just teach and teach and trust the Spirit to do what he's going to do. You have in God's word everything that you need to understand life and to be able to approach it and respond in a way that honors him. God has given us everything that we need in Scripture to have the right perspective in order to flourish spiritually. That's just the truth of the matter and we don't need private revelations, we don't need visions, God doesn't do that anymore. He has given his final word in Scripture and what I want you to see is that that has practical implications for your life because Scripture teaches us this great sovereign plan of a good God toward his people that includes everything in life and

everything that seems to spiral out of control from our perspective, God has perfectly in his hands and is working and orchestrating in order to bring good to your life in the end.

Well, that's what Scripture teaches and what you need to see is that to understand that is to have the edge, to have the cutting edge of all of your worst trials softened. Not eliminated. You know, we are still in the flesh, but softened in a way that says, "I have a perspective on life that gives me an ability to process and understand this so that I don't collapse like any old pagan would; that I don't just collapse because I didn't get what I want and now I say my life is over." No Christian should ever think or talk that way, not in light of what Scripture says. God is working all things according to the counsel of his will. God causes all things to work together to what? For good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. That doesn't mean it's not difficult but it means that we have a perspective that allows us to walk through the difficulty; to walk through it with a perspective that is still trusting God.

So what you believe about the sovereignty of God affects everything in life. It affects the way that you respond to everything and those who reject God's sovereignty or who don't want to think theologically, ultimately sooner or later they are going to feel the consequences of that, not because God is mean and wants to punish them but because you are rejecting and walking away from the very thing that gives you understanding and purpose and strength in life. That is right. Scripture teaches us a high view of God, a high view of his holiness and – oh beloved, a high view of his goodness, a high view of his love, a high view of his grace, a high view of his mercy, of his tender care for his children. That's who God is and that's why Christ suffered on a cross to save sinners like you, because God is merciful, God is good, God has good intentions for your life. God has perfect, wonderful, unspeakable intention for all of eternity for you.

Well, when you come to a God like that in prayer, he's entitled to your trust and you remember and you settle in your mind that history, all of human history and all of my life is operating according to – watch this – it's operating on a perfect divine timetable and it is operating according to a precise divine purpose. It's not random. Life is not random in God's universe. There is purpose and there is timing and God has it all in control and he is working it out without fail and he condescended to tell you as a believer in Christ through the Apostle Paul that in your life, God is working it all out for good. It's not just that he is working it out, he's working it all out for good; that it will be well; that you will be pleased with the result in the end.

So when we recognize this aspect of his will, here's the point: Jesus is teaching us here in this Lord's prayer, Jesus is teaching us to let that understanding of existence inform the way that you pray. So we come to prayer and we have to humble ourselves and acknowledge an undeniable reality. You and I do not know the future, we do not control it, things are going to happen to us that we do not like and that we do not understand. That's going to happen and most of you already know that by sad experience, difficult experience. Well, you take this realm of God's sovereignty and this realm of human existence of which we are a part and here's what you do, consistently day after day, this is to be the ongoing spirit of our prayer life so that it becomes a fundamental prism through

which we view all of existence, here's what you're doing, beloved, and this is not difficult, the concept is not complex, you don't need a theological degree to understand this, you don't need to know technical Greek terms. You've got a bigger challenge and that is to deal with your own heart and to have your own heart respond this way in the way that you say something like this, "Father, I understand your great sovereignty over life. I don't understand what's happening right now here but, Father – watch this, this is it, this is everything – Father, I align myself under your authority and, Father, I trust you. Your will be done. Father, I realize that you're working out a plan that is greater than I am. I don't understand but, Lord, I don't need to understand in order to respond rightly into my heart before you. God, I believe in your sovereign will and, God, I submit to it. I embrace it and I say, 'Your will be done.' How it affects me is secondary."

We embrace that truth especially when we do not understand and so the spirit of the prayer is something like this, "God, I know from the teaching of Scripture that you are working out your will. I know that. I accept that. I trust you, Lord. And even though I may not understand, I may not like it, Lord, nevertheless I submit myself to the divine will that you have established and I am content just to be in your hands, come what may." That's the spirit of, "Thy will be done." It is unlimited. It is comprehensive. In every area of your life, beloved, here's what I want you to see, in every area of your life no matter what's happening now, no matter what may happen in the future, no matter what consequences of past things you may be dealing with, it is always appropriate, fitting and pleasing to God for you to go before him and say, "Lord, in the midst of this, my single prayer is your will be done." And there is great peace in that because even if you don't understand the circumstances, you can say, "This is what my Lord wants from me and though the waves are crashing around about me, my Lord is riding on top of the waves. He has told me to be this way and here I am, Lord, responding to you as you have called me to do. Thy will be done."

In one sense, it's the simplest thing ever, in the sense that it's easy to understand. In another sense, it's probably the most difficult thing ever to come to a point where you know and trust God like that. Watch this: that you don't accept in your heart those motions of unbelief, of distrust and resentment against God. You don't accept that and that's where you wrestle with this, is for your own heart to come into submission with revealed truth; to gladly embrace the will of God, not grudgingly. "God, your will be done. You have a will. You are working it out. I trust you and I submit. I embrace it, Lord, because I know who you are and I know you've got my best at heart. You always have, you always will in every aspect. Lord, why would I not submit? Of course I submit, Father, thy will be done." So that orients your heart and aligns you with his purposes. "Father, I trust you as you work out your will."

Let me bring you to a second aspect of the implications of this, no less searching. We've said that it teaches us to trust in God's secret will, it also teaches us submission to God's moral will. Submission to God's moral will. There was a reason long ago that the hymn writer wrote the hymn, "Trust and Obey." Trust and obey. Trust God's will, submit to God's will, obey God's will. And here in the second aspect of the text, you see submission to God's will. As I said earlier, God's moral will refers to his commands, those biblical

commands by which we must live if we would act rightly before him. Do this, don't do that. You shall be this, you shall not be that.

Now, we need to do some theological thinking here for a moment. You're up for it, right? I know you are. When you talk about God's moral will, you instinctively realize that something different is going on than what we just talked about in his secret will. If you think about life or reflect on it at all even in your own life, let alone the world around us, you realize that something different is going on because men, you and I, men violate God's will, God's moral will all the time. We live in a world where God's moral will is gladly and proudly violated again and again and again. Men are in rebellion against his revelation in the skies and people will go out tomorrow and watch the solar eclipse and never have a thought about God in their mind. That's really sad. That's for another time. But men violate God's moral will all the time. They sin against and violate his commands. So here's the question: does that mean that his will is not being done? Does that hinder his ultimate purpose? Has all of our theology been undone by what I just said? And the answer is no. No, because beloved, here is what you must realize, is that even when men violate his moral will, even when men sin against God, God is still carrying out his secret will and fulfilling it.

I want to show you a couple of verses just to kind of clear away some misunderstanding. Look at Genesis 50, if you would, Genesis 50, where this principle is laid out early on in the progress of revelation. You remember the story, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers because they were jealous of him, of the apparent favor that he had with his father, Jacob. They sold him into slavery. The Egyptians took him away. Famine hits the land. Joseph's brothers are suffering, meanwhile in the background in their mind, Joseph has been raised to the second position in the kingdom of Egypt. The time comes for where God brings them back together and there is a reunion of sorts, and this whole episode that occurred years earlier is brought to bear; his brothers trembling in fear before the majesty of this man, of this brother that they had sinned so greatly against, and they had wronged him. No question about it. They sinned when they did that. What does Joseph say to them? He says in Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." He tells his brothers, "I know that you were sinning in your heart as you were doing this and your action, in and of itself, was wicked. But there was a greater purpose that God was working out through your actions and that will was never violated. That will was not frustrated even though you have accountability for the way that you sinned against God in your own heart."

In a similar way, turn back to the book of Acts 2. We'll try to pull this together. Acts 2:22, Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost says, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know," watch this, "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God," there is God's secret will, he predetermined that this would happen, you step into time and he speaks to these Jews and says, "you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." You had the Son of God in your hands and in the wickedness of

your own heart you put him to death. You handed him over to the Roman soldiers so that they would crucify him. That was sinful. He was innocent and you had him crucified as though he was a criminal. You were sinful in what you did. But this was part of the predetermined plan of God. And how do we understand these things? God's secret will accounts for the violations of his moral will – watch this – and overrules the sin of men to achieve his purposes. God overrules the sins of men, the violations of his moral will according to his greater secret will in order to accomplish the purposes that he established before the beginning of time. That's a lot to take in but that's how great God is. He can overrule even the sins of men in order to fulfill his purposes without causing them to sin or without participating in the sin.

So that's kind of the theological interaction between his secret and his moral will but for us today, beloved, here's the way that you need to think about what, "Your will be done," means. We recognize the surpassing will of God. We've already addressed that but, beloved, this comes to the way that you respond to Scripture. "Father, Your will be done," is a recognition also that God has expressed his will in the commands to men and the commands to his church, the commands to his people, he has expressed his will in Scripture and, "Thy will be done," is a recognition that says, "Father, I submit to that. I place my will under yours in your will for the way that I live my life, in your will for my family, the world in which I live and my church. Father, my prayer is, 'Your will be done.' Father, I want to do it your way as you have revealed and commanded in your word." Thus understood, this prayer becomes a heart of obedience, a commitment to obedience that says, "God, I realize that you have commanded the way that we shall live. I bring my sin to you and I repent. I confess. Lord, your will is sovereign in my life, your will is expressed in these biblical commands. Lord, I repent of my violations. I turn away. I bend my heart. I soften my heart before your word. I soften my heart before your authority and while I was going in this direction, Father, I repent and turn toward a spirit of obedience in my life where disobedience previously ruled. Father, I have been a thief. Let me return what I have taken to those from whom I stole it. Father, I have been a liar, let me go to those and undo my lies with the truth. Father, I submit my heart to your word and I incline my heart to obey." Do you see the distinction? One, you are trusting in the greater outworking of God's purpose. Here in this realm we are saying, "God, I realize your word has authority and I need to conform myself to your word."

Think about it this way: in prayer, on what basis would you ask God to do things for your benefit if you're consciously violating his moral will in your life? Where is the integrity in that? The psalmist said in Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." The Lord won't respond. In a prayer like this, even moving beyond our own lives, this is a prayer that recognizes – watch this, watch this – God is more greatly glorified when people obey his revealed will than when they violate it. He will turn it all to his glory but God is more greatly glorified when his will is recognized and his will is honored than when it is violated. And as the disciples of Christ who come under his authority for teaching, we come to God with this spirit, "I realize that you are working out your will in my life. I have seen it in Scripture. Father, I submit to that and I trust you for it. God, I realize that you have revealed the way that you would have me to live. Father, I respond in a humble compliance that says yes."

So as we ask him, "Thy will be done," we are asking him to exercise his power to restrain sin in our lives. "Lead us not into temptation. Bring others to Christ through the preaching of the Gospel, Father." This is all so simple, beloved. I hope that you see the concept is not complex. The only thing that makes this difficult is our inward hearts of rebellion that want things our way. That's the only reason this is difficult. Everything else is simple. So we pray, "Father, Your will be done," by which I mean, "Father, I trust you as you work out your plan in my life. Father, Your will be done. Father, I orient my heart toward obedience to your word." This is the spirit of the prayer that Jesus teaches us, recognizing the authority of God, honoring it, trusting it, submitting to it. "Thy will be done."

There is a great encouragement for us as we respond to this teaching of our Lord. Turn in the Gospel of Matthew to chapter 26 and follow me all the way through to the end here, if you would. Matthew 26. Let me remind you of our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane as he was facing the horror of the cross. In verse 36, "Jesus came with [his disciples] to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.' And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.'" You see, beloved, the same Lord who calls us to pray this way knew in advance, understands by personal experience that this prayer, "Thy will be done," often comes at great personal cost. He understands, our Lord does, he understands by personal experience that sometimes you pray this in the midst of great grief and distress, and as the Captain of our salvation, he has gone before us into the battle and conquered in the way that he would have us to pray. He knows what it's like. "Father, if it's possible, let it pass. But Lord, in the end my prayer is not my will but thine be done."

What does that mean as you approach God through the Lord Jesus Christ to pray? It means that our Lord sympathizes. He knows the conflict that is submitted in the end. And not only that, beloved, not only that as we see this opportunity and this responsibility, this privilege and this prerogative that is ours in prayer, not only that, remember this, remember the sweetest thing of them all: remember that as you approach God in prayer as a Christian, you are approaching him through the perfect merit of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are approaching the one who has gone through human existence, the one who has prayed himself, "Not my will but thine be done," and now represents you at the right hand of the Father and you approach in the merits of your lovely Lord Jesus Christ, not on your own. Not in the strength of your faltering will and inconsistent commitment, but on the perfect strength and the perfect merit of Christ we come to God and pray this way so that, beloved, what that means is that you're weak as a Christian, your weak and imperfect prayers are acceptable to God because he accepts them through Christ, the one who prayed this way himself, who suffered for your sins, who represent you before the throne, and he envelops all of your weakness in his perfect strength. He has covered all of your sin and unrighteousness in his unblemished perfection. And in that you have perfect and confident access; that the ultimate grounds of the acceptance of your prayer is the

fact that the Father accepts the Son. And from that position of strength, the Father accepts the Son, the Father has accepted me in Christ. The Father has accepted the Son and you respond in saying, "Father, Thy will be done. Thy will be done." Respond with the trust and submission to which he calls you. What a wonderful Savior. What a wonderful Lord entitled to our full surrender and commitment to obedience. "Father, we say it once more, 'Thy will be done.'"

Let's bow together in prayer. I realize that for some of you this is all foreign and the idea of submitting yourself to God is like walking on the moon. It's not something that you really have even thought about. Well, beloved, to you I would invite you to come to Christ. He gave a blood atonement for sinners like you to rescue you from your ignorance and rebellion and he gladly extends his offer. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." You can come to Christ and be saved right now based on his promise and give yourself, give all of yourself including your will, over to him. He will receive you and cleanse you.

For you sweet and precious brothers and sisters in Christ, let me encourage you with this familiar passage as you contemplate these things in your heart. The basis on which we approach God is in Christ, not on the strength of our own commitment. Oh, we need to submit, yes, but ultimately it is in Christ. And the Scriptures tell us that "we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin," and the conclusion of that is, "therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Father, in the name of Christ we approach you. Following his instruction, following his example, following that which you are so preeminently worthy of, we humbly and simply pray that your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Father, as we leave this place, we tell you from the bottom of our heart as imperfectly as we might present it, Father, the core principle, the animating dynamic of our spiritual life is this: we trust you and we submit to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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