

Reading: Psalm 119:1-24

Theme: Your Will Be Done.

What is ahead for anyone of us? Would we want to know future joys or sorrows or when they will happen to us? Thankfully we do not know what the future holds. What does God's will hold for us? We do not know, but this is what we pray for in this 3rd petition of the Lord's Prayer "*Your will be done*". As we pray this, we may wonder "Can we trust Him?" We have noted the 1st 3 petitions are concerned with God - the hallowing of His name - the coming of His kingdom will cause His name to be hallowed, but the mark of His reign is that His will would be done - all are asked to be done on earth as in heaven.

We have seen we should not pray these petitions unless we mean that 1st and foremost they are true for us in our lives, for God's name to be hallowed in and by us, then in others; for God's kingdom rule to be known by us, through us and then in others. As we pray this 3rd petition "*Your will be done*" we mean it to be fulfilled in our life 1st of all.

1. What then is meant by the will of God?

This is a vast subject, but basically, we can help our understanding by separating God's will into 2 main areas - His secret will and His revealed will. Firstly: **God's secret will** (*or His decretive will or providential will*) is that by which He controls all things and directs their ends to **His** eternal plans and purposes. He does this in most minute detail and it covers all works of Creation and redemption. He knows every option He could take, does and will do; history is but His story being unfolded as He is in control. This is God's secret will - hidden from and secret to us - but known to Himself from all eternity. Thomas Watson wrote "*This secret will cannot be known, it is locked up in God's own breast, and no man, no angel has a key to open it.*"

That is the 1st area of God's will but see Secondly: **God's revealed will** - what He has revealed and made known. This is what He wants men and women to live by, to obey. God has not kept us in the dark about this, but has written us a glorious book to tell us all He requires of us - the Bible. Here He makes known to us all He would have us do to gain eternal life and how to live life to please Him and therefore what He wants us to do. God's will encompass these 2 distinctly separate, yet complementary areas. His revealed will makes known to us something of His secret unknown will. Both these 2 areas are involved when we pray "*Your will be done*".

2. What It Means to Pray This Petition.

When we pray this, we ask for God's will to be done 1st of all in our lives, meaning both His revealed and secret will. We are able to learn of God's revealed will and therefore obey it by working it out through obedience. God's secret will is unknown to us and it is revealed, unfolded in God's ongoing dealings with us in our lives. As this happens we need to submit to His will and we learn this petition encompasses 2 aspects of obedience:

A. Active Obedience: God has made known His will for our daily living to glorify Him, His name, to actively live in holiness in everything we do, think and say. We are to actively walk in obedience to His revealed will - Scripture, the Bible in all the various aspects of life we have. This is how He leads and guides us according to His revealed will. John Newton wrote "*How then may the Lord's guidance be expected? In general, He guides and directs His people, by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of His Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand and love the Scriptures. The word of God is not used as a lottery; nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which, detached*

from their proper places, have no determinate import, but it is to furnish us with principles, right apprehensions to regulate our judgements and affections, and thereby influence and direct our conduct.”

To do God’s will in our daily lives involves knowledge of His word. This is the eye that guides the foot of obedience e.g. going over stepping stones! We are not to have a knowledge of His word and then disobey it. We are to be doers as well as hearers of God’s word. It is a tragedy that many people have known much of God’s word and it’s been as a torch to light their way to hell! If we know all about the way of salvation, what God wants us to do to be saved and yet we do not trust Jesus as our Saviour, then we can go, even living religious, well informed and illuminated lives to a worse judgement. We are to know, apply, obey and live God’s will as revealed in Scripture.

Do we take time to read and know God’s word? J I Packer says of this petition *“Here more clearly than anywhere the purpose of prayer becomes plain - not to make God do my will (which is magic) but to bring my will into line with His (which is what it means to practice true religion.)”* In this petition we are asking God **not to destroy our wills**, but that **His will becomes ours**. In reality it is calling to God to do a mighty work in us as individuals 1st of all, then in others around us - for we are all fallen creatures, with deceitful, corrupt hearts, with wills inclined to do our own will and Satan’s bidding. There is a need for us to cry to God for Him to strengthen us, to enable us, to incline us to understand and to do what He has commanded.

Sadly, even as believers our own selfish, self-pleasing ways can often clash with God’s will for us. This means we have to deny self, not to pamper our wrong desires, lusts and cravings. If we are

honest, when it comes down to the nitty-gritty of everyday life, we find that regularly we would want our own will rather than God's if He left us alone and unchecked. To pray this petition means we want to cling to God, be loyal to Him and what He wants in spite of all that self would desire in opposition to His will, in spite of all the world's allurements and pressures on us to change course and sides.

This is not a matter of a quick prayer, or doing or not doing this or that, but it involves a titanic struggle as we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Incredibly in this petition we are asking for ourselves and for others to all have angelic obedience and longings! We do not pray for God's will to be done as in Calvin, Luther, Spurgeon, the pastor, not even Peter or Paul, but as in heaven - by all holy angels and by the redeemed!

Consider how angels do God's will - by their obedience and service. They do so at all times – no moods or off days, ups or downs, not when they feel like it, but wholeheartedly, willingly, lovingly, eagerly, fervently, readily and without tiring. Angels obey God by doing all He requires. We cannot imagine an angel grumbling or going grudgingly or delaying - but angels long, desire and seek to serve God, to obey His least command, doing so instantly. That is what we pray for ourselves and for others in *“Your will be done”!*

Yet to do God's will with active obedience involves us seeking His power and enabling, for left to ourselves we are as weak and as unstable as water, our hearts are prone to say and focus on *“I, me and myself”*. We need His Holy Spirit to enable us, keep us, empower us and guide us to do His will. Sadly, we may often feel God's will is the opposite to our happiness, but it is not so. If Adam and Eve had said *“Thy will be done”* and not *“My will be*

done”, they would have gained real happiness and not the sordid misery they did for themselves and for us. True happiness is found in “Trust and obey...”. We need to be simultaneously actively obedient **and** asking to Him for power to understand and do His revealed will; desiring the same for other Christians and for those who do not as yet know Him as their Lord and Saviour.

B. Passive Obedience: in praying this realise God is in control of all things, including the details of our lives. We know, I hope, He will always do right according to His holy and just character for His wisdom and love does not allow Him to make any mistakes. That is easy to say and yet we may fail to realise the implications of it. These implications seem to be either ignored or misunderstood by many in today’s Christian scene, but nothing occurs in this world, especially to His people, without God allowing it in His divine wisdom. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says “*When we pray that the will of God’s providence be done we request that ourselves and others might have a compliance of will with the will of God, so as thankfully to accept merciful providences, and patiently submit unto afflictive providences.”*”

It is easy to thankfully accept His merciful providences, but would we be able to patiently submit to His afflictive providences? Is not a phrase we often use “*afflictive providences*” but it would include everything we would feel as having gone pear-shaped, be a disaster, questioning why me and 1001 other questions concerning what or why is this happening to us or our loved ones? As Christians we are not unfeeling Stoics, harsh callous and insensitive persons. Not at all, for Christians hurt too, grieve, shed tears, have heart aches, pains, sorrow, know confusion of heart and mind, fear, anxiety and question why. We do not just shrug our shoulders and say “*What will be, will be!*” We are not fatalists.

As Christians we know our God, not as a far distant, uncaring, unfeeling being, but as our heavenly Father, who knows our needs even before we ourselves do, who loves us with an everlasting love and is working all things together for the good of those who love Him.

Dare we submit obediently to His will for our lives as our heavenly Father's wise, loving providence could bring on us all sorts of trials, sicknesses and sorrows? I find it so easy to grumble, complain, murmur, doubt His love and care, to stop trusting Him as my heart becomes so perplexed, even to be so daring as to question why and how dare He do this to me or to my loved ones!

As we pray "*Your will be done*" we are asking for a heart to obey our God and go His way even when it's against what we want or would rather shy away from. We are asking for passive obedience to accept His will. We do this knowing something of the greatness of God, His wisdom, power and seeing the greatness of His love for us and knowing He will work in our lives in the way He **knows is best**. Consider Job for just a moment - fabulous health, wealth and prosperity and all that was shattered and smashed in one day - all his children were killed and yet he said "*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised.*" Job looked beyond the secondary causes and he saw God in the affliction. Dare we submit to God's will, acknowledging the hand of this all wise, loving God and Father?

Recognise God is holy, loving and just in all He sends. He knows the end from the beginning, He knows His purposes in all we go through. God is holy, just and righteous - not only when punishes or afflicts the wicked, but also when the righteous, His children suffer. It is so easy in our times of suffering to assume it is a punishment for something we have done - it may be due to our sin

and folly, or because we are part of a fallen world, but mostly as the Lord refines us, smooths off the rough edges, disciplines and chastens us because He loves us. Job was loved, but he suffered much and was refined.

Are we still ready to pray “*Your will be done*”? Thankfully we do not know God’s secret will for us, but we know Him and His love. Surely this should cause within us a great trust, confidence and desire to say “*Your will be done*”. To do God’s will may not be an easy thing. He has not promised it will be, but He has given us an example that we will never suffer more than - the Lord Jesus. He alone perfectly knew God’s revealed and secret will and purpose. All the Father gave Him to do, He did perfectly. See Jesus when in the Garden of Gethsemane, as He was almost overwhelmed by the horror of all the cross involved, as His real humanity recoiled in horror and terror at what lay ahead for Him - the prospect of being made sin, bearing sins’ punishment and yet the Lord Jesus in this agony of mind, soul and body says “*Not my will, but Thy will be done*”. He wanted God’s will to be done on earth is in heaven - which was to save sinners, so glorifying God and this was His chief concern, joy and desire.

To desire and pray that God’s will be done may cost us, **BUT** in the light of His love and sacrifice, we can do no other than vow allegiance to our God. The Methodists have a Covenant Service draw up by John Wesley which quotes the words of the Puritan Richard Alleine and is renewed at start of each New Year:

“I am no longer my own, but Thine.
Put me to what Thou wilt, rank me with whom Thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee,
Exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Thou art mine, and I am Thine.

So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.”