

Sermon Transcript

October 9, 2011

Lord, Teach us to Pray

Thy Will Be Done
Selected Passages

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SCRIPTURE TEXT

John 4:34

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”

INTRODUCTION

“I wish I knew what the will of God was for me!” Have you ever said that? Perhaps you have said it this way. “I wish God would just spell it out for me in the sky so that I would know what to do.” Or, “I wish God would just speak to me, like he did with Abraham or Moses, and tell me what it is that He wants me to do.” “Should I go to this school or that school?” “Should I marry this girl or not?” “Should I take this job or that job?” “I just wish God would tell me what His will is for my life.”

When I was a Youth Pastor, I took a group of teenagers on a winter retreat. It was the worst retreat I had ever been on as a Youth Pastor. I had a group of guys with me who would not listen to anything that I said. They didn’t seem to have any interest in spiritual things at all. Looking back on it, I may have been wound a little too tight. I was trying to make these rebellious boys be “good” and that was not my job. I heard a great quote once, attributed to Ruth Bell Graham, the wife of Billy Graham. She said, “It is my job to love Billy, it is God’s job to make him good.” I should have loved them with no strings attached. But I didn’t. Before the weekend was over, to my shame, I gave up on those boys and packed the van and came home a day early from the retreat.

I was discouraged. I was writing my resignation letter in my mind as I was heading home on the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. I can remember looking back at those kids in my rearview mirror and just wondering what I was doing in that van with these kids. I said to myself, “I am not getting through to any of these kids.” I had hit bottom. I wanted to quit. In that van I was asking, “God, what is Your will? Could you just write it in the sky for me?”

We stopped at a rest stop and I went into the men’s room. Now you have to picture this. This was a big restroom. There were at least twelve stalls that lined the wall of that restroom. I “haphazardly” chose one stall, went in and sat down. As I was sitting there, I happened to glance at the bathroom partition to my left and I noticed a word that was scrawled into the partition right above the toilet paper dispenser. Now we have all seen words scrawled into bathroom partitions in public restrooms. Often, they are the kind of words that you do not repeat from the pulpit. But the one word scrawled into this partition, above this toilet paper dispenser, in this stall, at this rest stop was the word “Ministry.” (I am sorry for the personal nature of this story, I am just telling you what happened. God can show up anywhere!) Who in the world, besides God, would etch the word “ministry” in a bathroom partition? I felt a bit like King Bleshazzar in Daniel 5 when the hand appeared and wrote the message from God on the wall. I felt like I just had a burning bush experience. The will of God was clearly announced to me in the bathroom stall at the Hickory Run rest station!

Now I have to say that my initial reaction to this word was much like the reaction of Moses. “Not me Lord! Don’t make me get back in that van!” Finally I had God’s will written for me in the “sky” and I didn’t want to do it. A month later I was sharing this experience with some of the youth pastors I got together with on a monthly basis. When they heard my story, they started laughing at me. They said, “Don’t you know that “Ministry” is the name of a heavy metal rock band!” So much for the will of God being written in the sky.

This morning we come to the prayer request “*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” I don’t want to suggest to you that this request has nothing to do with trying to figure out God’s will on these subjective issues of life we face everyday. But I don’t think these kinds of issues form the major emphasis of this prayer request. What does it mean when we are asking that God’s will be done “*on earth as it is in heaven*”? How is God’s will “*done*” in heaven? How do the angels in heaven live out this request?

Philip Ryken puts it this way. “Imagine a work force comprised entirely of angels. Not fallen angels, who hate God and his work, but perfect angels who always serve him with joyful praise. Angels on the payroll—it would be every employers dream. For there are no slackers in heaven. Angels never go on strike. They never demand a raise or hold out for more benefits. They never call in sick, show up late, or take long coffee breaks. Angels never complain. Night and day, they work as well as they can, and as cheerfully as they can...Consider the outstanding performance review they are given in Psalm 103:20-21. “*Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.*” Ryken concludes, “Angels are God’s best servants because they always do what he says. Whatever the command, they say, “Your will be done, and then they do it. By obeying God’s every word, they make sure His divine will is done in heaven.”¹

John Calvin says that the angels “willingly obey God, and are intent upon carrying out His commands.”² Therefore the request we are making when we pray “*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” is that, just as the angels willingly obey the commands of God and do His will in heaven, we are asking that God would help us to willingly do His will here on earth. May we serve and obey God here on earth as the angels serve and obey God’s will in heaven. That is the major focus of this request.

Jesus is a great example for us of one who was intent on doing the will of God “*on earth as it is in heaven.*” The prayer of Jesus that comes right before the cross is “*Father not My will, but Your will be done.*” I want us to learn from Jesus this morning about what it means to pray and live “*Thy will be done.*” I would like to share with you four things you are praying for when you pray “*Thy will be done.*”

THY WILL BE DONE: A HEART CONFORMED TO GOD'S WILL

When you pray "*Thy will be done*" you are asking God to do something to your heart. This request is asking God to conform your heart to his heart. This is a prayer that asks God to marry your desires to his desires. It is a prayer that reflects Romans 12:1-2. We are asking God to transform our hearts. We don't want our hearts to be conformed to the patterns of this world. I want to want what God wants. I want to desire what God desires. I want to love what God loves. I want my will to match God's will. So, God, you need to conform my heart to your heart.

Jesus said it this way in John 4:34. "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.*" Jesus made this comment to the disciples after they had been out looking for some food to bring to Jesus. They had been traveling on foot, in the heat of the day and they arrived in Samaria; thirsty, hungry and tired. While the disciples were off looking for food, Jesus encountered a woman at the well and through their conversation, he met her deepest spiritual need. Unaware of this conversation, the disciples return with lunch and Jesus tells them, "*I have food you do not know about.*" I wonder if they got a little annoyed, thinking Jesus had a stash of food all along while they were out searching high and low for some food. And it is here where Jesus turns to them and says, "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.*" In other words, the heart of Jesus was married to the heart of the Father. It was his joy, his delight, his satisfaction and his passion to do the will of the Father.

Jesus made this assertion several times during His earthly ministry. In John 5:30 He said, "*I seek not My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*" Again, in John 6:38, He said, "*I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*" As we pray this prayer, we are asking God to conform our hearts to his heart so that we might desire to do the will of God. "Father, we want to do your will as it is done in heaven. So, do a work in our hearts. Conform our hearts to your heart."

The reason we need to pray that our hearts would be conformed to the will of God is because this is not our natural desire. We are not born with a desire to do the will of God. Our will is often at war with the will of God. Philip Ryken said that one time his brother-in-law was singing the Lord's Prayer as a solo from the back of the church and everyone had turned back and looked at him with a look of astonishment. All of a sudden he realized what he had done. As he was enthusiastically singing this great song he mistakenly sang "*My kingdom come! My will be done.*"³ We laugh, but sadly that is the song we vigorously sing every day. That is the true song of our hearts. And if we want to truly live this prayer, we need God to come and change our hearts. We need our wills and our hearts conformed to the heart and the will of God.

Martin Luther wrote a classic book called *The Bondage of the Will*. His premise in this book is that man does not have a “free will” in the sense that he can choose between God’s will or his own will. Because of the sin of Adam, the natural man is enslaved to sin and does not have the ability to please God by doing God’s will; and furthermore, man does not even desire to do the will of God. Man does freely choose, but he freely chooses to rebel against God. Show me one person, apart from Jesus, who has chosen to do the will of God on his own. Apart from the supernatural work of the Spirit of God, we can not do the will of God. Luther writes, “Man is a member of Satan’s kingdom and all his actions are under Satan’s sway. His reason is blinded; his will is hostile to God; he wants only to sin; and his choice is always sinful.”⁴ In theological circles we call this “total depravity.” Total depravity asserts that the natural man is never able to do any good that is fundamentally pleasing to God, and in fact does evil all of the time.⁵ “None is righteous, no, not one....No one seeks for God. All have turned aside.” The natural man can not do the will of God nor does he desire to do so.

But what we could not do, Jesus did! Jesus, who was without sin and born of a virgin, conceived of the Holy Spirit, did the will of God to perfection. There is not one time where Jesus did not do the will of God. There is not one time where Jesus failed to obey God. Obedience to the Father was His food. Jesus said, “*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” And because Jesus was completely righteous, because Jesus did the will of God, He became the perfect sacrifice for sins. He became our righteousness. So when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, God puts on us the righteousness of Jesus. He wipes our slate clean. “*Christ dies for sins once and for all. The righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God.*”

This is a work of God whereby we are given a new nature. This new nature is not a nature that is opposed to the will of God, but rather it is a nature that hungers for the will of God. Through Jesus Christ and through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, God has changed us. If you wish to do the will of God, the first place to start is to put your faith and trust in Jesus as your Savior. He will give you a heart to do the will of God. We still wrestle with desiring our own wills, but opposing our flesh is a desire and an ability to do the will of God. Praise God for Jesus!

The prophet Ezekiel put it this way in Ezekiel 36:26-27. “*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you....And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*” Isn’t it interesting how we keep coming back to the Holy Spirit? This prayer to do the will of God begins with a heart conformed to God’s heart. Is that not the work of the Holy Spirit? Is that not what we are praying for when we ask the Spirit of God to fill us? When he fills us, our hearts are conformed to the will of God and we find ourselves saying what the

Psalmist said in Psalm 119, *“I will find my delight in Your commandments . . . They have been my song . . . I love Your commandments above gold, above fine gold.”* When you pray *“Thy will be done,”* you are asking the Spirit of God to conform your heart to God’s heart.

THY WILL BE DONE: A MIND that COMPREHENDS GOD’S WILL

This prayer is also a prayer for your mind. When you pray *“Thy will be done”* you are asking God to help you comprehend, in your mind, God’s will. You can’t do the will of God if you don’t know the will of God. So we are asking through this prayer that God would reveal his will to us and that we would comprehend it.

When Jesus said to his disciples, *“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work,”* it is very clear that Jesus knew the will of the Father for his life. He had just engaged a woman in conversation about matters of eternity and she responded positively to this conversation and brought others from the town to meet with Jesus. When Jesus saw them coming he said, *“Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving his wages and gathering fruit for eternal life.”* This was the will of the Father for Jesus. Jesus was sent into the world to do the work that would lead to eternal life for us. Jesus knew it. Jesus knew the will of the Father and therefore he lived it.

This is why Jesus said what he said in Mark 10:45, *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Several times you hear Jesus saying in John 10, *“I lay down my life for my sheep.”* Jesus knew the will of God for his life. In Luke 9, for the first time, Jesus tells the disciples of his pending death. I love what Luke does then throughout the rest of the gospel. He shows Jesus obediently making his way to Jerusalem. We know what “Jerusalem” means for Jesus. It means the cross. Here is what you read in Luke 9:51, *“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”* In Luke 13:22 it says, *“As he made his way to Jerusalem.”* In Luke 17:11 it says, *“Now on his way to Jerusalem.”* In Luke 18:31 we read, *“And taking the twelve, he said to them, ‘See we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man will be accomplished.’”* In Luke 19:28 we read, *“And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.”* So there he is, in Luke 19:41, looking over the city of Jerusalem and we find him weeping over the city and a few days later he is praying, *“not my will, but your will be done.”* Jesus clearly comprehended the will of God for his life.

The same is true for us. If we want to do the will of God, then we must know and comprehend the will of God. How do you discover God’s will? The knowledge of

God's will for our lives is not the result of common sense, or the pulling together of ideas and thoughts from each other. You don't discover the will of God by looking deep inside your heart. Nor is the will of God determined by the latest polling data. God's will has been written for us in God's Word. Jesus describes the Holy Spirit in John 16 as the "*Spirit of truth.*" Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. We need to pray that through the Word and the Holy Spirit, we can comprehend the will of God as it has been revealed to us.

Now some of you may respond to that by saying that the Bible is too hard to understand. I will be the first to tell you that the Bible does have a lot of mystery to it; and that we will spend a lifetime just barely scratching the surface of the deep truths of God. That is part of what makes the Bible fresh to the most seasoned saint. But on the other hand, much of the Bible and the will of God could not be stated any plainer. Try some of these commands on for size. "Thou shall not lie." "Love your enemies." "Rejoice in the Lord always." "Do not be anxious about anything." "Let your yes be yes and your no be no." "Keep no record of wrongs." "Love your wife as Christ loved the church." "Children obey your parents." "Submit to one another." "Do not get drunk with wine." "Pray without ceasing." In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul said, "*It is God's will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality.*" That is God's will. There is no mystery in these statements. This is the will of God. We need to **read** the will of God so that we might **comprehend** the will of God and thus **do** the will of God.

I am not saying that the will of God can be merely reduced to a set of rules. Unfortunately, that is often what we portray to our culture. Christianity is not just about morality and enforcing a standard of morality on others. Ultimately, Christianity is about Jesus and the need for a Savior and the need for spiritual life and transformation. I love what Tozer says about how to grow in our spiritual lives. In a devotional I referenced in my weekly e-mail he said, "Be hard on yourself and easy on others. Carry your own cross, but never lay one on the back of another. Cultivate the fellowship of the Triune God by prayer, humility, obedience and by denying yourself."⁶ I think we tend to be easy on ourselves and hard on everyone else. I shudder to think where I would be if it were not for the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit in my life. Therefore, I comprehend the will of God to be a call to a life of humility towards God and towards my fellow man. That is Christianity.

When you seek God in His Word, you don't just discover His commands. But for the one who has the Spirit within him, the Word becomes alive and changes us. In Hebrews we read, "*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*" In 2 Timothy 3 we read, "*All Scripture is God-*

breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” We go to the Word of God, not just so we can know the will of God, but we come with the conviction that there is power in the Bible. It is the Bible that the Holy Spirit uses to humble us, to teach us, to rebuke us, to correct us, and to train us in godliness. People who do the will of God are people who are being changed by the Word of God. Engage your mind in God’s Word.

THY WILL BE DONE: A SPIRIT CONTENT WITH GOD’S WILL

I do want to acknowledge that when we pray this prayer, there is that subjective part of God’s will for our lives that isn’t spelled out for us in God’s Word. There are many situations in our lives where we do not know God’s will for us. Often this includes suffering and hardship and difficulty. So when we pray this prayer “*Thy will be done*” we are entrusting our lives into the hands of the all wise and all good God who knows His perfect will for us. It is a prayer of trust. Through this prayer, we are asking God for a spirit that is content with God’s will for our lives.

Ryken is good to remind us that the prayer for God’s will to be done in our lives is not always a safe prayer to pray. He says of this prayer “we are yielding to God his right to do as he pleases.”⁷ For Jesus that involved the suffering of the cross. It was in the context of suffering that Jesus placed his trust in God’s will for his life. So must we. In Romans 12:2, God’s will is described as “*good, acceptable and perfect.*”

As I have been working through this series I have been reading portions of Philip Yancey’s book on prayer. One of the things I really appreciate about Yancey is that he is not afraid to think through the dilemmas we often experience in prayer. What about unanswered prayers? What about the inequity there seems to be in God answering the prayers of some and not others? I think 9/11 is a perfect example of this. On the tenth anniversary of this tragedy, some spoke of the miraculous deliverance and protection they experienced on that day as they escaped from the Twin Towers and they readily attributed it to God. At the same time, others cried in anguish over the fact that God did not deliver their loved ones. In fact, to this day, some remain bitter towards God.

I know people of great faith who have been healed and people of equal faith who have not been healed. Ultimately, God is in control and though God’s will can be hard, God’s will is always good. I like how Yancey has settled this issue in his own heart. He said, “My own emphasis in prayer has moved from petition to companionship, and I no longer agonize over the issue of unanswered prayer.”⁸ I like that. My spirit is content when I know my God is with me. So when I pray this prayer, I am asking for a spirit

that is content with God's will. I do not think for one minute it is a sign of a lack of faith if you pray for deliverance or healing and then cloak that prayer for God's will to be done. When you ask for God's will, that is the ultimate prayer of faith.

I find particular comfort from Romans 8:26-27. Everyone who suffers knows Romans 8:28. *"And we know for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* But do you know what comes before this verse of assurance? Listen, *"Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought."* Have you ever felt like that? You are not sure what the will of God is in your situation or your suffering. You don't even know how to pray accept to ask for God's will. Listen to what Paul says for this situation. *"But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."* Isn't that great? The Spirit of God prays for us according to the will of God. Therefore, our spirits can be content and can trust God through the deep waters of life. Like Jesus we can say with a spirit of contentment, *"Thy will be done."*

THY WILL BE DONE: A WILL CONSUMED WITH GOD'S WILL

The last observation that I want to make about this prayer is that to really pray this prayer, you need to be pray for a will consumed to obey the will of God. Through this prayer you are asking God to consume your will with a passion to do the will of God. Is that the resolve of your heart? I like what Jesus says in our text this morning. He says that not only has He come to do the will of God, but He has also come to finish the will of God. Can you hear the resolve in His voice when He makes that statement? Nothing will deter Jesus from going to that cross. It is a hard road. It is a road of sorrow and grief. But this road is God's will. Peter says of the cross in Acts 2:23, *"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."* Jesus was consumed with doing the will of God. This prayer is a cry for the same resolve.

The Apostle Paul came to the end of his life and he said this to his young protégé, Timothy, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."* Paul had resolved in his heart to be faithful to the end. Don't you want to be able to say that at the end of your life? The instruction of Hebrews 12 is this, *"let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* Don't play around with sin. Pray that your will would have the resolve to do the will of God.

I ran into a friend of mine last week who I hadn't seen since college. He has been a pastor for over 20 years in the city of Brooklyn. He was telling me what God had done over the past several years and the inroads they made into some of the youth of the city. He said when he first got there the church was barely hanging on by a thread. There were about 15 people there and unbeknownst to the church, a gang had gained access to the church and had been meeting inside of the church. Here is what Rob discovered about the gangs of his neighborhood. They demanded something of their members. If they didn't follow the rules, then they risked bodily harm and financial consequences.

He started comparing that to what the church was doing to reach the youth of there area and he said, "all we were doing was playing games." They began to see God work when they started demanding something of the kids. Following Jesus is by grace but it demands something of you. It demands that our wills be consumed with doing the will of God.

There is a great declaration of resolve that was pinned to a wall by a young African Pastor. I have read it to you before, but I think it is good to hear it again. Listen to his resolve.

I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed.
I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made.
I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ.
I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.
My past is redeemed, my present makes sense,
my future is secure.
I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking,
small planning, smooth knees,
colorless dreams, tamed visions,
mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.
I no longer need preeminence, prosperity,
position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity.
I don't have to be right, first, tops,
recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded.
I now live by faith, lean on His presence,
walk by patience,
lift by prayer, and labor by power.
My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven,
my road is narrow, my way is rough,
my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear.
I cannot be bought, deluded, or delayed.
I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice,
hesitate in the presence of the adversity,

negotiate at the table of the enemy,
or meander in the maze of mediocrity.
I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up,
stored up, prayed up, paid up,
and preached up for the cause of Christ.
I am a disciple of Jesus.
I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know,
and work till He stops me.
And when He comes for His own,
He will have no problem recognizing me – my banner will be clear!⁹

CONCLUSION

This week pray that God's will be done in your life as it is in heaven.

Pray for:

- A heart conformed to God's heart
- A mind that comprehends God's will
- A spirit content with God's will
- A will consumed with God's will

Pray that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven for God's glory and God's kingdom and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹Philip Ryken *When You Pray* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishers, 2006) 19

²John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 2*, Ed. John T. McNeill, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) 906.

³Ryken, 94

⁴Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1957) 53

⁵Edwin H. Palmer *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1972) 13

⁶A. W. Tozer "How To Make Spiritual Progress" in *The Dwelling Place of God*

⁷Ryken, 95

⁸Philip Yancey *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006)

⁹Author Unknown - Attributed to a young African Pastor who some speculate was martyred for his faith.