

Thy Will Be Done

Catechism Reading:

Q/A 124

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It was probably one of the most anxious moments experienced by any human being. The darkness hung like a black shroud over the night sky. It seemed to fairly press on the shoulders of the solitary figure stooped over in a corner of the public park. He is tense. His facial muscles fairly burst the skin. Desperation is not far off. He drops to his knees:

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but your will.... if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

With anxiety, and no little dread at the events that await Him, Jesus prays, in the night chill of Gethsemane.

He prays the very prayer that He himself taught His disciples in a much calmer place and a much more peaceful time.

“*Our Father in heaven.....
Your will be done.*”

Earlier this year we spent time considering the Lord's Prayer, in the interpretive light of the Heidelberg Catechism. Tonight we'll pick up the task with this petition: *Your will be done.*

Let's read it together -

Q/A 124, p.921 (hymnal)

Notice, first where “*Your will be done*” is placed in the great prayer of Jesus.

After:

- Our Father
- Hallowed be your name
- Your Kingdom come

Before we pray for the will of God to come to pass in our lives there are three things we need to have securely in place.

1. We pray this prayer in the context of **relationship**.

Never, ever, ever may I forget that God LOVES me and has the absolute BEST in plan for me in His grand, eternal scheme.

Recently I met with someone working through some rather difficult stuff. He said to me - “*Jeremiah 29:11. Know it? That's my lifeline. It keeps me going. 'For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.'*”

Never, ever, ever may I forget that I am His child, **NOT** a slave!

AND – As His child – safe!

“*See, says the LORD, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hand.*” (Isaiah 49:16)

“*Our Father in heaven.....*”

2. We pray this prayer in the context of **wanting so see God glorified**.

In Ephesians 5 Paul talks about the relationship between husband and wife. Then he pauses in v.32 and says, “*this is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.....*”

Marriage is, first of all, not about itself. It is about pointing to covenant faithfulness between God and His people.

In a healthy marriage a person is deeply delighted in seeing their beloved honored, complemented, praised, having their reputation enhanced.

And so, in spiritual marriage - the love relationship between a believer and the Lord - one of the greatest delights a believer can have is to see God glorified. So they pray:

“*Hallowed be your name.*”

*"Our Father.....
....Hallowed be your name."*

3. We pray this prayer in the context of recognizing that our life is part of a bigger picture; we are part of the plan of God, part of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

History, my life, yours - is about the coming of the Kingdom of God.

*"Our Father.....
.....Hallowed be your name.....
..... Your kingdom come....."*

In **that** context, then,
we pray for God's will to be done within our lives.

"Your will be done."

The catechism sees this petition as primarily a yielding in obedience.

In Gethsemane it was terrifyingly difficult.

It meant Jesus had to stay and await the arrival of Judas.

Do you know how hard it is to sit and wait in the quiet, in the dark, when you know something horrible coming?

How long is the night before surgery?

Or when you receive the email at 4pm, saying "*report for a meeting at 9am*" in a company busy downsizing - how long is that night?

Jesus had to wait.

It meant that Jesus had to actively pick up the cross and carry it to Golgotha.

It meant remaining silent even as legions of angels stood poised ready to rescue him if but one word were uttered

(Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? Mt 26:53)

Your will be done.

There are two equally important things at work when we pray this prayer, a negative one and a positive one:

- a. the negative:** slaying our own selfish will and desires (which our consumer society spends so much time and money building up)
- b. the positive:** seeking to merge ourselves into the plan and purpose of God (which our secular society spends so much effort discounting as wishful thinking, or anthropologically developed myth)

It is the crucial business of making Sunday's worship extend into Monday and Tuesday..... right through Saturday night;

the worship of obedience, Romans 12:1 worship:

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Hear the words of Jesus:

Matthew 12:50: *"For whoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, that one is my brother and sister and mother."*

"Your will be done – on earth as it is in heaven...."

We look to heaven and see the angels as our examples. The Psalmist says,

"Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his

*word.... you his servants who
do his will."*

[Ps. 103:20-21]

Angels are the ones who carry out the will of God.

They **DO** it,

perfectly,

and so form the role models for those of us struggling here on earth.

Perhaps as we contemplate the obedient action of the angels we grow discouraged.

We see their perfection.

We see their closeness to God.

And we see our imperfection;

Our distance from God.

We become tempted to throw our hands up in despair.

Then, if that happens,

let's remember that our worship is not of angels.

Let's not allow our gaze to remain on them.

Meditate

- instead -

on the one who sits in heaven having perfectly carried out the will of His Father during His life on earth.

Let's think of the Son of God,

seated on a throne at the right hand of the Father,

having ascended victorious after triumphing over all the seductions of human will, all the demonic-inspired temptation, and all the wooing of the world.

And remember the unfailing promise of the gospel that Jesus stands before the throne of the Father saying,

"Credit perfection to their account.

Credit their imperfection to me."

That is the solid foundation that allows us to grow in ability to live that prayer.

Which is how it works.

Holy living, submission to the will of God, is not an overnight experience.

It is the growing experience of a lifetime..... literally.

It takes a lifetime.

I visited this week with Mrs. Veenstra, turning 97 next week.

If you ask me she is one of the greatest role models we have in our congregation of devotion, wisdom, and Christian integrity.

And that dear saint said to this little snot-nosed young 43 year old punk of a minister, she said to me:

"Pastor, even at my age, feeble and limited though I am, I still find myself wrestling – after a whole lifetime – with sin. Only when I go home to Jesus will that battle be over. I have made just the beginning of pure obedience."

Yes, sister Veenstra - it **IS** a lifelong process!

We pray, we work, we long for growing obedience.

Remember, the Christian life is like pushing a wheelbarrow up a hill.

If you stop moving, stop applying effort, what will happen to the wheelbarrow?

Back down the hill it goes.

Our human depravity is like gravity, ensuring that obedience and holiness goes downhill the moment we stop working, longing and praying for the will of God to come to fullness in our lives.

"Your will be done – on earth as it is in heaven..."

In broad terms, we know it.

*You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart
and all your soul
and all your mind
and all your strength.
And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

No wonder it's a lifelong thing!!

So we begin. Faithful in little things. And as we prove ourselves faithful in little things, the Lord will present us with larger challenges.

That's how sanctification works.

Jesus, in Luke 19:11-27 tells *the parable of the 10 Pounds*.

The Master, leaving on a trip, gives 10 servants 10 pounds. At the return of the master one has made five pounds. He is rewarded with the care of 10 cities. A second is faithful - having made 2 pounds. He is rewarded with the challenge of caring for 5 cities. The third was a slouch. Didn't try at all. The master says to him, *"You wicked slave!"*

Obedience in little things, brings spiritual reward and larger challenge.
Spiritual sloth brings the chastisement of the Lord.

That is how Christian living works.

Believers who earnestly seek to hear God speak in their heart and life, find that as they begin to pay attention, they start to hear His voice more and more often, with greater and greater clarity, very specifically - words and pictures that are very concrete to their immediate lives.

Why?

Because they are faithful in responding to the little whisperings, and so become entrusted with further jewels from the mouth of God.

Believers who are careful and stewardly, living with open and generous hands when it comes to handling small amounts of money, find again and again that they begin to run into far larger sums. They are faithful with small amounts, and so the Lord entrusts them with far larger economic responsibilities.

Congregations that show themselves to be open and hospitable, faithful in discipling one or two new believers find that the one by one eventually becomes a trickle. And the trickle can grow into a veritable river. They are faithful.

But congregations that focus on feeding their own desires and wants will never have inquirers darkening the door. The Holy Spirit guides them elsewhere.

Dr. Neal Plantinga calls that *"spiritual inertia."*

"Your will be done - on earth as it is in heaven."

In specific cases, sometimes we're not sure.

I remember one person wrestling with whether to remain in business, heading a particular corporation, or whether to sell out and enter seminary.

Lord, he prayed, what is your will for my life and the life of my family?

Here at Calvin Church, we wrestled long and hard
Lord, what is your desire for this building? Renovate or not?

How to do that?

I don't have time to say much tonight. Let me recommend three books:

Henry Blackaby	<i>Experiencing God</i>
Dallas Willard	<i>Hearing God</i>
Leanne Payne	<i>Listening Prayer</i>

They all talk about how to become aware of circumstances as the Lord directs and changes them in His providence; beyond coincidence.

They remind us to pay attention during devotional times of passages from the Scriptures that suddenly rivet our attention, which the Holy Spirit causes to leap at you off the page.

They coach us in learning to pay attention to an inner, still voice which secular folk may write off as conscience or intuition.

Learn to hear and work with each of these.

Try, in small ways, to follow what you are hearing.

Test them - always - against the written Word of God.

I promise that God will reward small obediences with larger opportunities.

And always remember this - when God calls, be ready to respond.

Don't wait until a full road map is laid out. That is never how the will of God is revealed in Scripture.

Ever.

- the widow's jar of oil always only had a little in it, never filling full (1 Kings 17)

- Israel in the desert knew the final destination, but the next stage of the journey was hidden in the cloud (Exodus 13). They were simply told to follow, day after day.

Which is how we are to follow the leading of the New Testament version of the cloud from heaven, the pillar of fire at night — the Holy Spirit.

Step by step.

Remember the song by Rich Mullins -

"Oh God, you are my God. And I will ever praise you.

Oh God, you are my God. And I will ever praise you.

I will seek you in the morning.

And I will learn to walk in your way.

And.....

step by step

you'll lead me.

And I will follow you all of my days."

- Abraham was called to go to "*the land that I will show you*" (Gen 12:1). He wasn't given a full CAA trip tik before he headed out.

- Peter was told to get out of the boat. He wasn't told what would happen when he did (Matthew 14).

- The disciples were told to cast their nets on the other side. Nothing further (John 21).

And friend - Be gentle.

Don't get all fretting and worried about getting the plan of God right.

That fellow wondering about leaving business to enter Seminary – that was his biggest lesson. At one point he was frozen in fear of making a mistake. And finally the Spirit said to him, "*It's OK. Relax. As you seek to follow, you will be rewarded. God won't abandon you. He'll bless however you go when you truly believe it is His way you are following.*"

God is very patient. He was so patient with all the saints of scripture, who didn't always [often] get it right. He is gentle with us, too.

Finally – but by no means least - make sure you involve other members of the Body of Christ in discerning God's will.

Blackaby, Willard, Payne... any seasoned believer who is sensitive to God's voice will tell you this.

God reveals Himself **so often** through the community. We are parts of the Body - not meant to live alone.

Henry Blackaby tells the parable of the train tracks. We are walking down a track. The eye sees far off, and there is no train. So off we go. Soon the ear hears a whistle from behind. Bt the eye looks ahead and says, "No, I don't see anything. There is no train." The feet begin to feel a rumble coming from behind. The eyes may still protest. Looking ahead they see nothing.

But if this were your body, what would you do?

Working together the senses of the Body of Christ understand reality.

We cannot understand God's reality by ourselves.

As a congregation this has been an area where we have some serious growing to do, I believe.

You may shut me down, and say I'm meddlin' at this point.

But it is my honest observation that Calvin's track record is of different people having different projects - each functioning independently.

You do yours. I'll do mine.

Friends, do you think that we can really find God's direction and will for our congregation that way?

We need each other.

Together.

Together praying that great, powerful line -

"Your will be done!"