

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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THE WILL OF THE FATHER

Matthew 12:46-50

Did you catch the significance of what Jesus said here in Matthew 12? He was a busy man, fully engaged in ministry to people with all kinds of needs. People were coming and going. His popularity was on the rise. He was constantly surrounded by crowds.

On this particular occasion, His mother (Mary) and His brothers (the sons of Mary and Joseph) came to see Him. They wanted to talk with Him about something. What did Jesus do? He used the opportunity to make a spiritual point.

Was Jesus showing disrespect to His mother and brothers in what He said? No. He was simply saying, as it says in *The Message*, that “obedience (to God’s will) is thicker than blood.” He was saying that Kingdom ties – the ties of our devotion to Him expressed by doing God’s will – are more important than blood ties. He was *not* saying that doing the will of the Father makes us members of His family. He was *not* saying that we become members of His family by virtue of our obedience to the Father’s will. No. This is not some kind of works righteousness. Doing God’s will does not *make* us members of Jesus’ family. Instead, doing God’s will *identifies* us as the brothers and sisters of Jesus. That is a crucial distinction.

Those who do the will of the Father show themselves to be His children. Those who obey the Father’s will show themselves to be members of Jesus’ spiritual family. Obedience – the obedience born of faith – is thicker than blood.

Jesus also makes it clear that walking the walk of faith and obedience is more important than just talking the talk. In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7:21, Jesus says: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven.” Not everyone who talks about heaven is headed for heaven. Not everyone who talks about God belongs to God. Not everyone who talks about following Jesus is really following Jesus. Your “talk” is important, yes. But your “walk” is even more important, because what you do reveals what is in your heart. It is the doing of God’s will that confirms the genuineness of our faith and identifies us as members of Jesus’ family.

In Matthew 21 (verses 28-32), just a few days before His death on the cross, Jesus told a parable about a man with two sons. The father went to the first and said: “Son, go and work today in the vineyard.”

The son said: “Sorry, Dad, I can’t do it. I’ve got too many other things on my ‘to-do’ list today.” But later he changed his mind and went.

Then the father went to the second son and asked him to go and work in the vineyard. This son said: “Sure, Dad, I’ll do it.” But he didn’t do it.

Then Jesus asked His audience: “Which son did what the father wanted?” The obvious answer is the first son. Though initially he refused, he changed his mind and did what his father asked, unlike his brother, who talked the talk of obedience, but did not walk the walk.

It is not enough to say we want to obey God. It is not enough to say we want to do His will. Our way of life – what we do – has to match our words. It is by doing the will of the Father that we show ourselves to be His children.

And what is the Father’s will for our lives?

It is God’s will for us to repent of our sins and believe the gospel.

It is God’s will for us to trust in Christ alone – in His saving work for us on the cross – for our forgiveness and salvation.

It is God’s will for us to love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength (Mark 12:30).

It is God’s will for us to love one another as Jesus has loved us (John 13:34).

It is God’s will for us to live a holy life – a life of moral and sexual and spiritual purity (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7).

It is God’s will for us to be joyful always, to pray continually, and to give thanks in all circumstances – in the good and the bad (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

It is God’s will for us, as Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer, to hallow His name – to treat His name with the reverence, respect and honor He deserves.

It is God’s will for us to be His witnesses, to tell others about Jesus and His saving love.

All of this – and much, much more – is wrapped up in what it means to do the will of the Father.

The first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are all tied together. They all have to do with God: His name, His rule, and His will. But they all have to do with us personally as well. They all have to do with you and me. For God’s name is to be hallowed by me. His name is to be hallowed in my life and yours. His kingly rule is to be established in my heart and yours. His will is to be done by me. His will is to be done in my life and yours.

There is a personal dimension in all of these petitions. It is not just “out there” in the world at large that we pray for His name to be exalted, His kingdom to come, and His will to be done – though we do long to see all of this fulfilled here on earth, and everywhere on earth, just as it is in heaven. But it begins with us. It begins with me. It begins with you. God’s name is to be hallowed by us and in us. His kingdom rule is to be established in us. His will is to be done by us and through us.

It is true, of course, that you and I cannot do God’s will without God’s help. We cannot do God’s will on our own. We cannot do God’s will without God’s power and grace at work in our lives. Doing God’s will is not simply a matter of trying really, really hard. No matter how hard you try, if you are doing it in your own strength and not God’s, you will fall short. It takes God’s power and a heart yielded to Him to do God’s will. But when we obey God’s

will from a heart of faith and love, we show ourselves to be members of Jesus' spiritual family.

One of my favorite authors is a pastor named John Ortberg. Many of you have heard me talk about the impact of his book *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat* on my life. Recently I've been listening to his newest book *Faith and Doubt* on CD. In one of his sermons he told this story about using a GPS (a global positioning system) on a trip. Here is what he said:

"(My wife) Nancy and I were in a part of the country we had never seen before. We were going to be driving on obscure back roads, so we got a rental car, and the guy at the counter said to me: 'Along with this car, if you want, you can also get a GPS system.'

"Have you ever used a GPS system?"

[I never have. I've ridden with people who had a GPS, but I have never used one myself when driving.]

Here is how it works. "You plug it in and punch in your destination. A woman's voice will tell you how to get wherever it is you are going.

"Well, when the guy at the counter asked if I wanted one, my immediate response was, 'No. That is going to cost me something. I don't need that. I can find where I'm going without that.' Anyone want to guess what my wife weighed in with? 'Get the GPS.' So we got the GPS.

"Here's the deal: You can get the box. You can have the lady in the car. But that doesn't mean you trust her. If you trust her, what do you do? You do what she says. You go where she tells you to go. She says, 'Turn left,' you turn left. If she says, 'Turn left,' and in your heart you think, *But I want to turn right*, you remember that the Bible says, 'There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death' (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25)."

Now here is where the application comes.

"To follow Jesus means I will do what He says. [It means I will do God's will.] I will mess up a lot. I'm going to need His power. I know that. But I (have to make it my) intention. I say to Him: 'God, with Your help, as best I can, I will do what You say. I will give You my life, my time, my obedience.'

"Here is the thing: If that is not your settled intent [if it is not your intention or desire to do God's will], then it is best to be honest about it. If that is not your settled intent, then whatever else you might be, you are not a follower of Jesus. An admirer, maybe. But Jesus is looking for followers. He is looking for people who will say, 'All right, God.'"

In other words, Jesus is looking for people who will say to God, "Your will be done in my life," and mean it.

(C. S. Lewis once observed that there are really only two kinds of people in the world: those who say to God, “Your will be done,” and those to whom God says, “All right, then have it your way.”)

Ortberg continues: “There is something else you need to know about Jesus – something that is also true when dealing with a GPS system. At one point when we were driving in this car, I was quite sure the lady was wrong. She said to go left, and I didn’t go left. I went right, because I knew she was wrong. She made an interesting response. [Some of you have probably experienced this.] She said: ‘Recalculating route. When safe to do so, execute a U-turn.’ I knew she was wrong, so I unplugged her. That’s the beauty of that little box. You can unplug her.”

The result? “I got lost as a goose. My wife enjoyed that immensely.

“So we plugged that lady back in, and you know what she said? She said: ‘I told you so, you little idiot. You think I’m going to help you now? You rejected me. You just find your way home by yourself.’ No – she didn’t say that. She said: ‘Recalculating route. When safe to do so, execute a U-turn.’

“Now see,” said Ortberg, “that’s grace. As soon as you’re ready to listen, as soon as you’re ready to surrender, God will say, ‘Here is the way home. Execute a U-turn.’ That is repentance. ‘I’ll bring you home.’ That is grace. That is Jesus. He is the only one with authoritative [infallible and unerring] wisdom about how to live. He is the only one who brings about forgiveness for your sin and mine. He is the only one to give any realistic hope of conquering death, of life beyond the grave.”

My friends, a GPS system is not incapable of error. It is not omniscient. But God is. If you follow Him, if you obey His will, He will never lead you astray. This is not to say that, if you trust in the Lord with your whole heart and devote yourself to doing the will of God, He will insulate you from the storms of adversity or suffering in life. God’s will for each one of us may – and likely will – include some kind of suffering or trouble. As Hank Hanegraaf, the Bible Answer Man, has written, to pray “Your will be done” includes the recognition that “God will not spare us from trial and tribulation but rather use the fiery furnace to purge impurities from our lives.” Any of you have an impurity that needs to be purged from your life? We all do.

So, if doing the will of the Father brings any kind of adversity or suffering into your life, accept it. Embrace it. Learn from it. And rejoice in it.

Do you want Jesus to include you among those He identifies as members of His family? Then, with a heart surrendered to Him in faith, make this not only your prayer but your way of life: “Not my will, but Your will be done.”

I close with these three quotes.

Missionary martyr Jim Elliot, only 28 when he was killed along with four other missionaries in a remote part of Ecuador in 1956, once said: "I have found that the most extravagant dreams of boyhood have not surpassed the great experience of being in the will of God, and I believe that nothing could be better." May that same conviction be ours, for there is no better place to be than in the center of God's will.

Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "The end of life is not to be happy. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may." May that same conviction be ours, for to do the will of God is to bring glory to God.

And Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "True holiness consists in doing God's will with a smile." I like that. "Doing God's will with a smile." May it be so in your life and mine.

May the Lord's name be hallowed.

May His kingdom come.

May His will be done.

By us. In us. And through us.

Here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Amen.