The Third Petition –
Your Will Be Done On Earth As It Is In Heaven

Matthew 6:10

The Lord’s Prayer #4

I once read this story in Readers Digest: “Attending church in Kentucky, we watched an especially verbal and boisterous child being hurried out, slung under his irate father’s arm. No one in the congregation so much as raised an eyebrow -- until the child captured everyone’s attention by crying out in a charming Southern accent, “Ya’ll pray for me now!”

Isn’t that a good picture of what our prayer life often becomes? We wait until life’s troubles seem to have us tucked under its arm and then we cry out for help. This morning we are going to learn about a very different type of prayer – an amazing prayer. “Your Will Be Done On Earth As It Is In Heaven.”

I. God’s Will Is Not Our Will

Wow, what a prayer! We say to God, “Please bring about what YOU want in my life, not what I want. YOUR will be done, not MY will.” The problem is, we don’t naturally want anyone’s will to be done except our own. Watch young children for a while. Crying and shouting and fist clenching – all efforts to get their own way. “I want it! I don’t want to! Gimmee…Gimmee…Gimmee!” Watch adults for a while. Crying and shouting and fist clenching – all efforts to get their own way. “I want it! I don’t want to! Gimmee…Gimmee…Gimmee!” Our sinful nature wants to pray, “My will be done” not “Thy will be done.”

It wasn’t always this way. When Adam and Eve walked the primrose paths of the Garden of Eden they truly wanted God’s will to be done. Their will was perfectly in line with God’s will. They wanted what He wanted. They wanted to do what He wanted them to do. They did not want to do anything He did not want them to do. They trusted that whatever His will was, it would be best for them.

But, then came that fateful day when Adam and Eve listened to the whispers of the devil and suddenly what they wanted was what God had forbidden. “I don’t want you to eat that fruit,” God had said. “I want to eat that fruit,” they thought. Their will was no longer in line with His. You and I have inherited this rebellious nature. Paul describes it this way in Romans 8:7: “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”

So, to pray “Your Will Be Done” goes against our sinful nature. Perhaps a simple question will help us to realize this. Do we really want God’s will to be done? “Of course!” we quickly respond. “We pray for it over and over in the Lord’s Prayer, don’t we?” But, do we truly understand what that means? It does not mean I want God’s will done as long as it agrees with my will. It does not mean I want God’s will done as long as it is comfortable for me. It does not mean I want God’s will done as long as it changes absolutely nothing in my life. Praying “Your Will Be Done” means I want to think and say and do what God wants and nothing else.
The Bible is where we discover what God wants. Here God tells us that His will is for children to obey their parents in everything. His will is for mothers and fathers to teach their children about Him. His will is for wives to submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ. His will is for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. His will is for us to be content and not greedy. His will is for us to keep from getting drunk. His will is for us to avoid any form of sexual immorality. His will is for us to forgive each other. His will is for us to put the needs of others before our own. These are just a few examples of God’s will for us.

I am willing to bet that at least one, if not many of these examples made you uncomfortable. I don’t really want to obey my parents. I don’t really want to submit to my husband. I don’t really want to put my wife’s needs before my own. I don’t really want to give up getting drunk on the weekend. But, you see, these are the things we are praying for in the Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer! We are asking God for these things to take place in our lives! So, we had better think very carefully about what we are asking before we pray “Your Will Be Done.” Martin Luther put it this way, “If these self-willed people really thought about this and noted that they are praying against their own will, they would be frightened by (this petition)” (LW 42:49). In another place Luther wrote, “It is really frightening to hear ourselves say, ‘Thy will be done.’ What can be more terrible than our own frank admission in this petition that God’s will is not being done and that his commandment is disdained” (LW 42:45).

II. We Ask For God’s Revealed Will To Be Our Own

So, if our sinful, natural will is contradicted by God’s will, why do we pray this petition? Because of Christ. Through faith in Christ we have been transformed. We have a completely different way of looking at things. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” God took our sinful self and draped it over Jesus on the cross. Paul says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (5:21). We have become the righteousness of God. Through Jesus God has restored His image to us. So, now a war is raging. We still have our sinful nature clinging to us (that’s the part of us that cringed at God’s commands earlier) but we are also a new person the Holy Spirit has created (that’s the part of us that wants to do God’s will). Battles rage between these two every day of our lives. This why this petition is so important! Every time we pray “Your Will Be Done” we are calling for reinforcements!

When a military leader prepares for war he wants to bring as much firepower as possible to bear on his enemy. He would like, not just to defeat the enemy, but to crush them with as few of his own casualties as possible. The stronger his forces the better.

The stronger our faith is the better. We don’t want to take any chances. So, we pray “Your Will Be Done” asking God to reinforce our faith, making it stronger and stronger. We don’t want sin to have a chance. That’s what we mean when we say “Your Will Be Done On Earth As It Is In Heaven.” In heaven the angels and the souls of the saints departed perfectly and joyfully fulfill God’s will at all times and in every way. “That is the way I want to do your will, Lord, even here on earth.”

III. We Ask For God’s Hidden Will To Be Done

There is one other aspect of this petition that we need to address. So far, we have talked about God’s will as it is revealed in the Bible. But what about those aspects of God’s will that He has not revealed to us? I am talking about the “why” questions. “Why did I come down with this terrible
“Why did my loved one die?” “Why didn’t I get that job?” “Why didn’t I get that scholarship?” “Why did he break up with me?” “Why, why, why?” Theologians refer to these things as God’s hidden will. While God has revealed a great deal of His will in the Bible, He does not promise to answer every question we might have.

We often do the same – with our pets, for example. We have a poodle named Luther. Luther has allergies that cause him to chew his feet. So, now his feet have no hair on them and are raw and painful. This morning I sprayed his feet with an antiseptic that helps his feet heal and stop itching. But, it hurts when that spray hits his feet. He always looks at me as if to ask, “Why are you doing this to me?” I have tried to explain it to him but I don’t think he understands. But it is not important that Luther understands why. What is important is that I love Luther and will do what is best for him.

We are children of a loving heavenly Father. Is not important that we understand why He does what He does. What is important is that He is our loving heavenly Father. So, when we pray “Your will be done” we can pray with confidence. “Lord, I don’t know what your will is for my future, I don’t know what tomorrow will bring. But I know that you love me. You proved it at the cross. So, whatever it is “Your will be done.”

Isn’t that great! It takes a huge weight off our shoulders. We don’t have to worry about the future. We don’t have to constantly second-guess what God is doing. Whatever God’s will is, it will be for the best. This does not mean it will always be painless, just like your baby’s shots aren’t painless. But, they will be for the best. Think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. What was his ultimate prayer? “Father, your will be done.” His Father’s will was that He go to the cross. It was not painless, but it bought our salvation. It was for the best.

What is God’s will for you this week? What is his will for me? What is his will for Pilgrim? Some of His will we know from His Word. And we pray that we would do His will this week and always. We don’t know what God’s hidden will is and that is just fine. We know it will be for the best. So, this morning we confidently pray to our heavenly Father, “Your will be done.”

Soli Deo Gloria