

# **Your Will Be Done!**

Isaiah 51:17-23, Luke 22:39-53 (ESV)

December 18, 2005

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” What an agonizing prayer! What a profound act of faith! “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” Jesus begins by crying out to his Father! And thus the message and the hope of Christmas are fulfilled. The angel Gabriel had told Mary years earlier that Jesus would be the Son of God. And now the purpose of that sonship is coming to its fruition. So the point of Christmas is not simply that the Son of God came to be born among us as the baby Jesus, as wonderful as that is. Instead, the point of Christmas is that the Son of God came to be born among us as the baby Jesus in order to die for us as the man Jesus. And so Jesus ended his prayer, “Not my will, but yours, be done.”

The two parts of this prayer on the Mount of Olives reflect the two-sided miracle of Christmas. First, Jesus knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.” Here we see the humanity of Jesus Christ. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.” Jesus did not want to die. Jesus did not look forward to the cross. He was seeking an alternative. If there were any other way possible, he would have preferred it. In his struggle, we see our humanity. In his agony, we see ourselves. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.” Remove this betrayal, trial, and crucifixion from me. Take away this horrible death. We do not have here a Savior who is immune to human feeling, loss, suffering, or pain. We do not have here a Savior who floats above the messiness of human life, unaffected by it. We do not have here a Savior who is naive about the cruelties of religion and of government or who is naive about the cost of defeating sin, death, and evil. Instead, we do have here the one person of all human history who does know the cost of sin, the cost of our sin, and that is precisely why he wants to know whether there is any alternative to the cross.

At the same time, kneeling down, in the depths of prayer, Jesus found the grace, courage, and obedience to do what had to be done. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” Surely here we see the divinity of Jesus Christ, and in this joining of his humanity and his divinity we see the truth and reality of Christmas. Jesus here offered to God his perfect obedience to God’s will, that obedience which alone could defeat the powers of sin, death, and evil, even when that obedience cost him his life. In this

willing sacrifice, in this submission, we see his divinity: “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” Surely this is not a simple human possibility.

“There appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer,” when he rose from prayer, never again did he ask to escape from the cross! The possibility of a release was raised only in the midst of his growing resolve: “Not my will, but yours, be done.” Did you catch the echo of the Lord’s Prayer? “Father...your will be done.” How better for Jesus to teach us to pray than for him to pray the same prayer under the worst of circumstances! “And when he rose from prayer,” he was ready to meet his betrayer, to go to trial, and to hang on the cross, for you and for me.

So it is that Jesus Christ—staring into the face of betrayal by one of his disciples and desertion by all the rest, staring into the face of death, staring into the face of divine judgment, not because of anything he had done but for your sins and for mine—so it is that Jesus Christ struggled, prayed, and won the victory for you and for me. He came to peace with doing the will of God even when it was God’s will that he go the cross and die for you and for me. Thanks be to God that Jesus met the challenge! Thanks be to God that Jesus fulfilled the ancient hope of Christmas! Thanks be to God not only that Jesus was born but also that he was willing to suffer and to die on our account!

Now, the obedience of Jesus Christ to the will of God, even when that obedience cost him his life, shows us that the will of God was more important to Jesus than his own life. He started out asking to be saved from the cross. He ended up submitting to the cross. How could this be? The glory of God, the majesty of God, and the will of God are more important to Jesus than his own life. So should the glory of God, the majesty of God, and the will of God be more important to us than our lives or our salvation. Salvation is important, or God would not have sent Christ to bring it to us. And yet, our ultimate purpose is to glorify God; salvation is not the goal, but the way we get to the goal.

Jesus shows us something on the Mount of Olives. Others think the universe is self-contained, that this world is all there is, that what you see is what you get. And yet, such a view cannot make sense of our lives. If this world were all there is, it would make no sense to sacrifice one’s life. But if there is another world, a larger reality, a greater truth, then it would make sense to suffer loss here—even to die—in order to align oneself with larger purposes, patterns, truth, reality, and the divine will. Life here is so good that we want to live forever. But with pain and disease and suffering and death we do not live forever here. Love here is so good that we yearn for perfect love. But love here is marred. Why do we want more than the world can give? Where do we get the ideas that such things exist? If the world were self-

contained, all of reality, how would we even be able to aspire to something more, something beyond the world? Yet, here we are in a broken world yearning for eternal life and perfect love.

Something within human life points beyond this life. Something within this old world points beyond this world. Jesus knew that life cannot be satisfied here in this world. The world that we see around us is not all there is to the world. The world we touch and hear and smell is not all there is to reality. There is another world beyond this world, a greater reality, a larger context without which this world makes no sense and within which alone it does make sense. The angel of the Lord had revealed this years earlier, saying to the shepherds and so to us, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” So Jesus came to peace with doing the larger will of God, even though it meant his death on a cross in this world. He had faith that the will of God for his life was good, even though God willed the end of his life as we know it here.

In today’s reading we see the humanity of Jesus Christ in that he did not want to die, and he did not want to face judgment on our account. On the other hand, we see his divinity in that Jesus knew what would happen and submitted himself to the will of God. And this is the meaning and outcome of Christmas. Jesus came to peace with obeying and doing the will of God even when that will did not lead to his own immediate good and led instead to a horrible death. It was God’s will that his only son would bear an unspeakable burden on our behalf. It is our burden, but we cannot carry it; God in Christ has carried it for us. So, we are the beneficiaries of Christ’s struggle on the Mount of Olives. We are the recipients of God’s grace. Our sin is forgiven because he paid the price. Our guilt is removed because he took it on himself. The burdens which crush our lives have been lifted off of us so that we can live anew. God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Jesus Christ has obeyed the will of God when we have not. His obedience has been counted for us.

Where does this leave us now? Having been forgiven, having been graced, we are now able, at least some of the time, on a good day, in partial and broken ways, to obey the will of God ourselves. This is a new possibility for us. Yes, we, like the disciples, are still weak. But after his resurrection, Christ regathered them as his very own. Thus they and we learn again not to rely on human strength but instead to trust in God alone. If Jesus Christ had to pray so hard that night—Jesus fully human but also fully divine, Jesus the Son of God—if Jesus had to pray so hard that night to seek, to discern, and to obey the will of God, think what we need to do in terms of prayer! Consider also that the disciples, who failed to pray, but who slept through the night, were utterly unprepared for the onslaught that came upon them. We need to pray!

There are at least three aspects to our doing the will of God today. The first is to seek the will of God. The second is to discern the will of God. And the third is to obey the will of God. First, then, we are to seek the will of God. We have to listen for it, and that is hard to do in a noisy world, where we hear many voices. The world says, Grab all you can! Jesus says, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24 (ESV)). That means to give all we can, which is the opposite of what the world says. The best place we can seek the will of God is in the word of God. And the best way to seek the will of God in the scriptures is through prayer, study, and worship.

Second, we are to discern the will of God. It takes wisdom to discern will of God, and it takes modesty in what we claim. At a conference on preaching a few years ago, a speaker told of seeing children at a school for the blind come in from the playground and have to sandpaper their fingertips. to make them sensitive enough to be able to read Braille! How can we make ourselves sensitive enough to discern the will of God in the word of God? One principle that we can learn from today’s reading is that any conclusion we reach which is to our benefit is suspect! There is nothing here about the Christian life being easy. If the cross was good enough for Jesus, it may be good enough for us, too. Sometimes God works not so much through our victories as through our suffering. In the example of Jesus Christ, we can discern the will of God.

Third, we are to obey the will of God. This is not easy. The philosopher Plato taught that to know the truth is to do it. In his estimation, the human problem was simply one of ignorance. There was no such thing as evil, or ill will, just lack of information. That problem is solved by education. If people knew what was right, they would do it. But the Apostle Paul wrote, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:15b, 19 (ESV)). Here is a more profound and accurate description and analysis of the human predicament. Even when we discern the good, we cannot necessarily do it! We need God’s help! We need God’s help to seek, to discern, and especially to obey God’s will.

What, then, is the will of God? We find it in the Ten Commandments about duty to God and duty to neighbor. We find it in the Great Commandment to love God and to love neighbor. We find it at Christmas in the birth of the Christ child. We find it at Good Friday in the crucifixion of the Christ. We find it at Easter in the resurrection of the Christ. And we find it at Pentecost in the sending of the apostles into all the world. The will of God is that the gospel of Jesus Christ be proclaimed to all the nations of the world and to the ends of the earth, until everyone has heard it and has an opportunity to believe.

## **Your Will Be Done!**

Jesus knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ won the Christmas victory in the struggle of prayer at the Mount of Olives! Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ came to terms with doing the will of God and never looked back! He went forth from prayer strengthened, determined, and obedient, all to our benefit. Now it is our turn. Now we are called upon to seek, to discern, and to obey the will of God for our lives and for the church. To do this, we may have to pray all night long. Are we ready to pray with Jesus, “Father... not my will, but yours, be done”?

*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

© Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, Pastor  
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church  
1627 Monument Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23220  
[www.grace-covenant.org](http://www.grace-covenant.org)