

Sermon for February 18, 2018 – Lent 1

John 6:38-40 (EHV)

Theme: God's Will is . . .

- 1) *for Jesus to save us.*
- 2) *For us to receive his salvation through faith.*

³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me, but raise them up on the Last Day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the Last Day."

For what are we exactly asking, when we pray: your will be done on earth as it is in heaven? When I was younger, I imagined this petition to be a request for peace on this earth: that people act more like the angels of heaven than the devils in hell. If this were the case, we wouldn't have hatred, wars or other tragic events like what happened in Florida this past week.

But here's the thing: even though God, in his unlimited power, could "force" people to act good, the LORD actually desires something far greater than a change in human behavior. He wants to change hearts. He wants to save those who have rebelled against him that they might experience the full extent of his mercy and love. He desires people to have a renewed, eternal relationship with him through faith in his Son - and to this end he is always working.

With Jesus as our guide, therefore, let us consider the wonderful blessing we are asking God to grant us in the third petition of the LORD's prayer, under the theme: **God's Will is:** *1) for Jesus to save us, and 2) for us to receive his salvation through faith.*

Part One: God's will is for Jesus to save us.

Now, it should be noted that even though God's will can include all sorts of things, God's ultimate will always centers on Christ and the work he came to accomplish. For this reason, Jesus says: *I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me.*

Jesus is, therefore, the ultimate fulfillment of the petition: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." How so? Because he came from heaven to earth for this very purpose: to accomplish what God foreordained in heaven before the creation of the world. And what exactly was that? Jesus tells us: *This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me, but raise them up on the Last Day.*

The Lord's will is our salvation. He sent Jesus to break and defeat every evil plan and purpose of the devil who, at first, seemed to have been successful in his scheme of separating us from God by corrupting human nature with sin. But the LORD had a plan to save us. He sent his Son Jesus to live the life of perfect obedience to God's law that we all failed to live. And having, thereby, won

our righteousness, Jesus carried all our sins to the cross where he, by means of his suffering and death on our behalf, paid for them in full. Jesus accomplished heaven's will on earth by reconciling the world to His Father so that, whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Since the devil could not prevent Jesus from reconciling us with God, he works all the harder to get us to turn from Christ - enlisting the wicked world and our sinful flesh to his aid. He always seems to be tempting us into some sin or another. Sometimes Satan entices us with pleasures and ease to get us to forget God. Other times he uses hardships or horrific events to tempt us to question God's wisdom, love, power or even existence. The devil likes to either blind us with feelings of self-righteous pride for not sinning as badly as others, or overwhelm us with feelings of such guilt and regret so as to get us to imagine that Christ won't forgive us unless we do something to appease him first.

Yes, the devil is constantly on the attack, but God's will is for the Christ to keep us safe for his mercy's sake, as Jesus says: *this is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me.*

And how does Jesus accomplish this? By sending the Holy Spirit who works within the Means of Grace to guide, encourage, strengthen and protect us against the devil's attacks. The Holy Spirit teaches us the truth, and the truth sets us free. More than this, the Scriptures tell us that Jesus' ears are always tuned to the prayers of his followers, for whom he is also interceding to the Father – praying for our protection. And as true God, Jesus is in control of world history. He promises to work in all things for the eternal good of his followers so that what he said will most definitely come true: he will not lose any of those God has given him. Even when they sin and stray, Jesus calls them back through the Gospel message of his forgiveness – frustrating Satan's schemes.

On the last day the devil's evil plans and devices against believers will be shown as completely useless. How so? Because Jesus will raise our glorified bodies from the dead, so we can live with him in the perfect, eternal, sin-free paradise the LORD will bring with him on the last day.

So understand, brothers and sisters in Christ, that when we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are asking the LORD to keep his promise to save us from every evil attack the devil, world and our sinful natures mount against us. We are praying for Jesus to save us, which we, in all confidence, trust that he will. And why can we be so confident? Because he – the eternal Son of God – promises it. More than that, he has already won the victory for us through his work of redemption. Because of this, we can confess the same confidence in Christ the apostle Paul expressed, when he wrote: *in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*ⁱ

Yes, God's will is certainly accomplished when Jesus saves us! Let us now learn how it is God's will that we receive His salvation through faith.

Part Two: God's Will is for us to receive his salvation through faith.

Someone might ask: “Who, exactly, are the people God the Father gave to Jesus to keep safe? Am I included in their number?”

The answer to those questions lies in the last verse of our text, which reads: ⁴⁰ *For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life.* In other words, the people God has entrusted to Christ’s care are all who both “see” and believe in him.

Note that, when Jesus is talking about those who “see” the Son, he is not talking about physical sight, as Jesus told Thomas after the resurrection: *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*ⁱⁱⁱ Rather, those who “see” the Son are those who see that he is the focal point of God’s entire plan of salvation, as Jesus once told some Pharisees: *You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*ⁱⁱⁱ

God’s will is *that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him* – that is to say, all who (by the prompting of the Holy Spirit working through the Word) acknowledge Jesus as their Savior, who forgives their sins - *may have eternal life.*

And this “eternal life” is not some future hope. No, it is a present reality. What I mean is this: our “eternal life” with God doesn’t just begin on the day we enter into glory. No, it actually began the day God awakened faith in our hearts through the Gospel. Ever since that day, we have belonged to Christ; and the Holy Spirit has been busy strengthening and defending that faith against all the enemies that want to destroy it. When we pray the LORD’s prayer, therefore, we are asking the Holy Spirit to continue to strengthen our faith in God’s Word until the day Jesus keeps his promise: *And I will raise him up on the Last Day.*

Now someone might say: “Why do we have to ask God to preserve us in our faith by praying the third petition of the LORD’s prayer? Isn’t believing in Jesus an easy thing?”

To this point, Luther once wrote: *“Ah, that is easily said! But no one knows what faith really is. It is a great art and doctrine, which no saint has learned and fathomed fully unless he has found himself in despair, in the anguish of death, or in extreme peril. For the power and effect of faith first becomes manifest in times of trial, as, for example, when faith must overcome sin, death, devil, and hell. These are not insignificant foes. They make you sweat; they crush your bones; they make heaven and earth seem too narrow for you. When devil and death approach, there is no other help than this Person who says: “I have been appointed as the One who will not lose you. Such is the Father’s will.” This is the way we learn the meaning of faith. . . . Even when I feel the gravest sins, I may say: “I still have forgiveness of sin.” Even when my sins oppress me most, when they gnaw, when they haunt and terrify me, I look to Christ, believe in Him with feeble faith, hold to Him, and say: “I am assured, for Thou hast said: ‘He who believes in Me shall have eternal life.’ ” Even though my conscience is troubled, and sin frightens me and makes my heart quake, it is written nonetheless: “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven” (Matt. 9:2); and: “You shall have everlasting life, and I will raise you up on the Last Day.” . . . Here you can see what it means to believe. It may indeed seem an easy matter, but it is in fact a high and great art.*

This, then, is the purpose behind the petition: your will be done on earth as it is in heaven: we are asking the LORD to finish his work of our salvation: keeping his promise to preserve every single believer in their faith until the day he returns. We are praying that the Lord frustrate all of Satan's schemes – preventing his wicked plans from coming to fruition. And if we do experience great evil on this earth, we pray that he keeps his promise to somehow and in some way make it serve our eternal good. Finally, we are asking that the Father send the Holy Spirit to strengthen and encourage us by means of his Gospel so we can invite others to have the same hope we have in Christ. Why? Because God's will is all about preserving our salvation: the salvation Christ came to win for us through the death on the cross and that is received through faith in his Holy Name. God will keep his promises no matter what. Therefore we pray: your will be done, O Lord. Amen.

ⁱ Romans 8:37-39

ⁱⁱ John 20:29 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ John 5:39-40 NIV84