

“Thy Will Be Done”

April 24, 2022

2 Chronicles 20

Psalm 143

1 Peter 4

Jehoshaphat was the great-great-grandson of Solomon.

It has been around 70 years since the death of Solomon –
and the Edomites no longer fear the house of David.

And so when Jehoshaphat hears that “a great multitude is coming against you”

*he was afraid and set his face to seek the LORD,
and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.*

And the people responded and came to seek the LORD.

Do you remember what Solomon had prayed?

“And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel,
when they pray toward this place.”

Jehoshaphat remembers what Solomon had asked,

and he remembered also what God had said in response:

*If my people who are called by my name humble themselves,
and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,
then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

(2 Chron 7:14)

And so Jehoshaphat does what God called the Son of David to do:

He stood in the house of the LORD and he prayed.

O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven?

(Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name!)

You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations.

(thy kingdom come!)

And he recites the history of God’s faithfulness to his people.

But not just some random piece of history!

He remembers how God promised the land to Abraham’s seed.

And he recounts the establishment of the temple,

and he echoes the prayer of Solomon.

In short, Jehoshaphat is saying, Okay God, you said this is what we were supposed to do.

So we’re doing it!

You said to bring to you all of our prayers in whatever trouble we faced –

to bring it to you, and put it in the light of heaven.

And so he prays, “thy will be done – on earth, as it is in heaven.”

Praying “thy will be done” is not primarily about “resignation” to God’s will.

No, it is about conforming earthly realities to heavenly realities!

“Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

He takes the very real peril of the moment
and he sees it in the light of the glory of God.

Because he knows who God is, who *he* is, and what his problem is,
he is able to pray:

O our God, will you not execute judgment on them?

For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us.

We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

This is the point.

Jehoshaphat is praying, “Thy will be done.”

I am doing your will – because you said that we were supposed to pray.

So now, O God, please do whatever it is that you are now supposed to do!

This is not a passive “que sera sera” – do whatever you want!

When you pray “thy will be done”

you pray that with expectance, because you *already know* what God’s will is.

You just don’t know how God’s going to do it!

Jehoshaphat doesn’t know how God is going to deliver them.

It’s still possible that the deliverance is going to come *after*
rather than *before* the invasion of the enemy.

But then the Spirit of the LORD comes upon Jahaziel, one of the Levites,

and he prophesies that *the battle is not yours but God’s*

and if they will but go out to their posts in the morning,

then they *will not need to fight in this battle.*

Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf.

And so they praise God and go out to their posts,

and Jehoshaphat even puts singers out in front of the army

who sing Psalm 106 (or maybe 136 – there are several Psalms that start that way –

but it would appear to be the same Psalm

that Solomon had sung in the temple in chapter 5-7)

So there is nothing passive about Jehoshaphat’s approach.

He has been commanded to stand,

but rather than stand around and wait,
he starts the celebrating early!

And the fear of God comes upon all the nations!

When you pray, “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,”
you are praying that the nations would fear the LORD,
because the will of God is that every knee would bow
and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

And this is at the heart of our Psalm of response, Psalm 143:

Sing Psalm 143
Read 1 Peter 4

Going from Monte’s funeral to Gilbert’s deathbed yesterday
reminded me that praying “thy will be done” is hard.

We would far rather that “my will” be done.

What do we mean when we pray “thy will be done”?

Because we use the phrase “God’s will” in two different ways.
In fact, the apostle Peter uses two different ways of saying it in chapter 4!

In verse 2, Peter tells us that our sufferings should help us think about how to live
“no longer for human passions” – no longer driven by our desires –
but for the will of God.

The will of God is contrasted here with “what the Gentiles want to do.”
Are you driven by your desires?
Or are you living for the will of God?
Are you living the way God’s calls you to live?

So in verse 2, we are talking about God’s revealed will:
how God wants us to live!

But then at the end of the chapter,
Peter urges us, “let those who suffer according to God’s will
entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

Here, “God’s will” refers to what he has ordained – what he has decided to do.

That’s what we mean by God’s *decretive* will.

His *prescriptive* will refers to what God has told us to do.
We are supposed to *do* the will of God.
But his *decretive* will refers to what has decided to do.

And this is part of the point that Peter makes when he says that if you suffer as a murderer –
that's not suffering for Jesus!
If you suffer as a meddler – someone who sticks his nose into something that's not his business!
That's not suffering for Jesus!

But if you do what is right – if you live according to the will of God (the prescriptive will –
what God tells you to do!) –
then your suffering *is* suffering for Jesus!

Because the point of praying “thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven” –
is that we want these two aspects of God's will to come together!

We want to see

When we pray “Thy Will Be Done” what are we praying for?

Our Larger Catechism (which I put in the bulletin) says it well.
It starts off by explaining why Jesus says, “on earth as it is in heaven.”
Because there is a problem on earth!
We have a habit on earth of *not* doing God's will!

Q. 192. *What do we pray for in the third petition?*

“A. In the third petition (which is, *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*), acknowledging that by nature we and all men are not only utterly unable and unwilling to know and to do the will of God, but prone to rebel against his word, to repine and murmur against his providence, and wholly inclined to do the will of the flesh, and of the devil:”

Notice that the catechism draws on both senses of God's will.
First, the prescriptive will – what God commands us to do –
is what we rebel against.
We don't want to do what God says!
“No one tells me what to do!!”

But then we also murmur against his providence (his decretive will).
And so we turn to do the will of the flesh –
which turns out to be the will of the devil.

And so, when we pray “thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” –
we must re-orient ourselves toward heaven (like Jehoshaphat) –
and toward our heavenly Father!

And so,

“we pray, that God would by his Spirit take away from ourselves and others all blindness, weakness, indisposedness, and perverseness of heart; and by his grace make us able and willing to know, do, and submit to his will in all things, with the like humility, cheerfulness, faithfulness, diligence, zeal, sincerity, and constancy, as the angels do in heaven.”

If I am going to pray that God’s will would be done on earth,
then I need to pray that *I* would do God’s will –
that I would *know* what he commands – and *do* what he commands –
and *love* what he commands.

The apostle John says this well in 1 John 2:15-17

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Paul says it similarly in Colossians 4:

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. (Colossians 4:3-7)

The will of God is your sanctification!
The will of God is that you might be holy!

Yesterday was a day of bewildering contrasts!

I went to the funeral of a former drug dealer and gang banger –
who had seven children with six different women
(only one of whom he married).

For 20 years he was living for the lusts of the flesh – for stuff and status.

But God...

when God got a hold of Monte McGill,
Monte would not rest until everyone he knew, knew Jesus.

And when Monte died – his soul was made perfect in holiness
and immediately passed into glory –
and his body, being still united to Christ,
will now rest in the grave until the resurrection.

Fifty-one years – with a whole lot of good, bad, and ugly all mixed together –
Monte was a whole lot like the rest of us!

So then we went home – and from there we went straight to the hospital,
to be with Matthew and Naomi and little Gilbert.

But God...

God had placed his name on Gilbert –
and God does not forget his little ones.

And so when Gilbert died – his soul was made perfect in holiness
and immediately passed into glory –
and his body, being still united to Christ,
will now rest in the grave until the resurrection.

Seven days is not a whole lot of time!
Gilbert never had an opportunity to decide to do anything!

But whether you live for 51 years or 7 days –
you can still *do* the will of God!

And that's what we pray for!

We pray that God will make us – *and others* – able and willing
to know, do, and submit to his will!

We've been using the Psalms to illustrate the petitions of the Lord's Prayer –
and today we are praying Psalm 143 together.

So turn in your Bibles to Psalm 143,
and let us see how to pray "thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Psalm 143 begins by showing the contrast between earth and heaven:

*Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy!
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!*

Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

You can see how David once again begins his prayer with the theme of
"hallowed be thy name."

This is all based on God's faithfulness and righteousness.

No matter how righteous you may think you are,
no one living is righteous when he stands before God.

But then David turns to the reason why he prays –
the reason why he seeks mercy.

He comes to God because of the miseries of this life –
because of the troubles and afflictions that he faces:

*For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground;
he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.
Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled. (v3-4)*

But David remembers God's kingdom –
God's mighty deeds, the wondrous works of salvation that God has done:

*I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done;
I ponder the work of your hands.
I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.*

I grew up in California – so I thought I knew what parched land looks like.

But then I spent a summer in Eritrea, and I learned what a parched land looks like.
East Africa is very similar in climate and terrain to the land that David knew.
It is hot and dry and can go for months without rain.
Water is precious.

When I came back to Philadelphia, my eyes were stunned by the *green*.

And when David refers to himself as a parched land,
he is saying that God's judgment has withered him—
or at the very least, God's withholding of blessing.

Because water is a blessing from God.
And David longs for the living water that flows from the living God.
I pant, I thirst, for the living God!

And that's why David prays.

What about you?
Do you thirst for the living God?

Jesus said "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger,
and whoever believes in me will never thirst." (John 6:35)

What does this mean?
Haven't we all experienced the parched land?
Times when our souls pant and thirst for the living God,
and yet we feel as though we dwell in a barren wasteland?

Let's keep going in Psalm 143, because we will find the answer to this question:
Answer me quickly, O LORD! My spirit fails!

*Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit.
Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust.
Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.*

Before you can take this prayer and make it your own,
you need to see that Jesus took this prayer and made it his own.

Even Jesus reached this point –
and on the cross, our Lord said, “I thirst.”

As we saw on Good Friday –
there are days in the Christian life that end – with Jesus – in the grave.
There are days that end in darkness – in depression – in grief and anxiety.

And this is true for us – because it was true of Jesus first!

Jesus cried out to his Father,
but in spite of his cries, he *did* go down to the pit!
But while he went down to the pit,
he did not stay there!
Because, as the Psalmist says, “let me hear in the morning your steadfast love...”
And Jesus heard the Father’s voice
in the morning of the third day – the first day of the new creation –
and Jesus heard in the morning of your steadfast love,
and he was raised up from the dead!

There is a sense in which we share in the sufferings of Christ –
even tasting for a time of his dereliction, his abandonment.
But that means that even our thirsting – even our longing to know Christ –
is a participation in him.

But what does all this have to do with praying for the will of God to be done?

David explains this in verses 9-12
*Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to you for refuge!
Teach me to do your will, for you are my God!
Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!
For your name’s sake, O LORD, preserve my life!
In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!
And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies,
and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul,
for I am your servant.*

In the midst of trouble, in the midst of trial, in the midst of everything going the wrong way –
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Notice that for David, this is not a passive resignation to *que sera sera*, whatever will be, will be!
NO!

When you pray, “thy will be done”
you are *not* saying “I don’t care – you do whatever you want.”

Rather, you are praying,
“what is happening is *not* your will and we *want* to see your will be done on earth –
even as your will is done in heaven!”

Notice that there are two parts to David’s prayer for the “will of God.”

- 1) Deliver me from your enemies
- 2) Teach me to do your will

Your will is for my enemies to be destroyed!
How do I know this?
Because I am your servant!

At the dedication of the temple, Solomon had prayed that God would hear *his servant*
(singular) – the Son of David.

God’s promise to his servant, David, was that he would bless David’s son,
and adopt David’s son as his own son –
and therefore David’s son rules over God’s kingdom.

So when David prays that God would cut off his enemies and destroy his adversaries,
he is praying that the kingdom of God would come!
He is praying that God’s will would be done on earth as it is in heaven!

And so we pray Psalm 143,
that God would destroy the enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ.
We pray for the coming of the kingdom of God –
we pray that God’s will would be done on earth!

“Thy will be done” is not a prayer of resignation,
it is a prayer calling upon God to *act*.

Now, it is *also* a prayer that God would teach us to *do* his will.
Jesus is the Son of David, the servant of the Lord, who did this perfectly.
And because we have been united to him,
when we pray “thy will be done”
we are praying that God would teach us to do his will.
that we and all men may deny our own will,
and without any murmuring obey Thy will, for it alone is good

We are praying that the Spirit of God would lead us on level ground,
that we might know and do that which God has commanded.

When you pray,

pray that God would take away our blindness – and help us see!

pray that God would take away our weakness – and give us power!

pray that God would take away our perverseness of heart – and give us new hearts!

Because only then will we be able and willing to know, to do, and to submit to God's will!

But as our catechism puts it – it's not enough simply to know, do, and submit to God's will –
we need to know, to do, and to submit to God's will

with *humility* – after all, *he is God*, and we are not!

with *cheerfulness* – because he is God –

therefore we can have confidence that his will is *good* for us!

And it takes faithfulness – and diligence! –

we need to be *constant* in our seeking to know and do God's will!

We're not very good at that – are we?

This is why Jesus taught us to pray –

“thy will be done – on earth, as it is in heaven.”

We need to practice!

You probably don't need to change the things that you pray for.

Rather, we need to change the way that we pray!

When we pray for the sick – how do we pray?

Well, what is God's will for the sick?

I'm not asking for God's secret will – his decretive will –

I'm asking, *what is God's revealed will* for the sick?!

Think back to 1 Peter 4.

God's will for the sick is that those who suffer according to God's will

entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good!

So pray for the sick that they will hold fast to Jesus!

Certainly you can pray for their healing – that is part of God's revealed will!

The coming of Christ's kingdom brings life and health and peace!

But when we pray for God's will to be done – on earth as it is in heaven –

we are praying primarily for us – and for others –

to know, to do, and to submit to God will!

Because it's worth remembering that both Monte's death – and Gilbert's death –
resulted in life and health and peace!

The resurrection of Jesus has just obliterated the power of death!

Death simply *cannot* win.