

"THY WILL BE DONE"

(Matt. 6:10)

Sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention, Hot Springs, Arkansas, evening session, May 15, 1918, by Dr. W. H. Geistweit, St. Louis, Missouri.

The purpose of my message is to make this sentence of the prayer of our Lord the marching order of the Christian. I would repeat it so often, with strong emphasis on the word "done", that it would become the ringing challenge to every man who attempts to do work for the Kingdom of God.

It has grown upon me during these later years that we have not read the prayer as it should be read; for the reason that we have not interpreted it as Jesus intended it should be interpreted. This prayer, called the Lord's Prayer, is not merely a model prayer for the Christian; it is a subtle revelation to the Christian of the whole program of Jesus. If the Sermon on the Mount is the constitution of the new Kingdom, as I think it is, the short prayer in the heart of that sermon is in itself an outline of the program of God in that Kingdom. We have not so read it. It has been a sort of relief from the necessity of making a prayer for ourselves; so when we have run out of material we simply repeat the Lord's Prayer; entirely overlooking the fact, as it seems to me, that it is the prophecy and program, the principles and marching orders for Christians of all time.

"Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed by thy name; thy Kingdom come; they will be done;" -- thy name hallowed, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done -- BE DONE, on earth!

I am making an examination of one part of that prayer, so often misunderstood, so confusing sometimes that not a few have made shipwreck of faith. How common are these questions: What is the will of God? Can that will be known? Is it unchangeable? What is the use of praying in the face of an unchangeable will?

Is it not possible that we have misread the Scriptures? How often passages have been wrested from their surroundings and made to declare things never intended by the Master himself. Here are some strong scriptures: "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matt. 21:22.) "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, that he should go, and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you." (John 15:16.) "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." (I John 3:22). "And this is the confidence we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." (I John 5:14,15.) In some very clear way the will of God is bound up in these wonderful promises.

What is the will of God? What is not the will of God?

The will of God is the purpose of God.

May I be permitted to inject this thought here? It is not my purpose to discuss the war. But no man can take up such a theme

without it thrusting itself into the very heart of the great conflict. It is common nowadays to hear people say, "God has some great purpose in this war." I have some very dear friends who take great comfort in the assurance that this great tragedy is ordered of God; that it is all in accordance with the will of God. If that is so, then God is responsible for it; then God's will is for it; then even Germany is fulfilling the purposes of God; -- and there is nothing left for us to do but to submit ourselves to the awful situation -- awaiting the pleasure of God's will. Is that so? No. Rather, is it not because we believe that Germany is thwarting the will of God that we are in this conflict today? A few weeks ago, in St. Louis, Sr. George Adam Smith, better known to us as Dr. Smith, the greatest living Old Testament scholar, said: "We know that this dreadful conflict, this awful war, was brought on the world by the sin of one nation." If that is so -- then we know the will of God; if that is so, there will be a new note in our prayer -- thy will be done." It will not be submission; it will be the enlistment of humanity to the cry of a burdened humanity; and the answer to heaven will be -- thy will be DONE! We must mobilize our idealism behind the men who are mobilized.

The will of God is always opposed to evil. The will of God is always actively good. God cannot be a partner with anything that is evil. Let me make this matter clear to you. I want you to understand me thoroughly. With all my heart I loathe Teutonism; with all my heart I despise its philosophy from Nietzsche to Bismark, from Bismark to the Kaiser; and I loathe it in America as much as I loathe it in Germany. There is no place for its idealism, no place for its

propagandism, in this fair land. I believe the whole system is contrary to the will of God. If this is so, there are some serious implications which we must clearly recognize: we cannot do the will of God, we cannot bring in the Kingdom of God, unless we ourselves are part of that Kingdom. Let us make this appeal to men in the camps; If you are fighting for the cause of God, you should be on God's side.

Is the issue flung before us by some of the great thinkers and teachers -- "Kaiser or Christ" -- the real issue? Then let us see Christ -- first. Then this is the great fundamental message of the people of God to the world: Seek Christ. Then let us understand it clearly: our first fundamental preparation is spiritual -- to get into harmony with God.

Closer still. To say, thy Kingdom COME, thy WILL be DONE, means, that the will of God is the best law, the best Kingdom for the earth. This is not an arbitrary rule, but a fundamental law, perfect, good, loving, the best for the world. So surrender to the will of God does not mean resignation, a quiet, helpless, surrender to something you cannot help. Here is our common error. Eli, one of the judges of Israel, was an unwise father. His sons went wrong, and he never restrained them. Things went bad in Israel -- through the profligate sons of the old judge. One night God called to a little boy and told him to go and tell Judge Eli that sorrows were coming upon Israel -- because Judge Eli's sons had prepared for a bitter harvest. Hear Eli say, with pious resignation, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good!" No, Eli, it wasn't the Lord; it was Eli who brought on the trouble, because he was a foolish father.

Hear me, surrender to the will of God does not imply submission to calamity, but it means the seeking after -- the effort to fit human action into -- the will of God. So we pray, "thy will be DONE," show me the way to discover that will; I surrender; I enlist -- to think, to work, according to the will of God.

What, then is the will of God in my life? Fundamentally, that I shall always do right. In the morning I pray, "thy will be DONE today." And I go out into the world. What have I said to God as I passed out? THY WILL BE DONE. What is that will -- as I face the world? There shall be no oppression; there shall be no tyranny; there shall be no dishonesty; there shall be no selfishness -- God's will is against it all, and I have said, "thy will be DONE -- thy will is the law of my life!" How this interpretation would sweep through our whole industrial and commercial system, and there would speedily be an end to the selfishness that is at the bottom of all our trouble.

But more than that. Keep in mind the contention here. For a man to pray in that spirit is not merely to interpret the will for his own inner life. In a word, it is not submission, it is enlistment. I have said, thy will be done -- today; and I pass out into the world. I see evil; I must oppose it; I must strike it for I have said, they will be DONE! I see sin all about me; I see open vice; the open saloon; I must strike it, for I have said thy will be DONE! Ever remember that God's will is linked up with the activities of men. God's defeat is tied up in your failure -- and in mine. Herein is revealed the helplessness of God. "How often would I -- but ye would not." How it rings down the years! God's success is bound up in the obedience of men. What solemn things I am saying here. God cannot do your work

without you.

How wonderfully sweet is this truth expressed by Antonio Stradivari - by George Eliot. There is a controversy between Naldo and Antonio. Naldo ridicules Antonio for his pains in making violins; he thinks it is foolish, and will not add masses either!

Hear Antonio:

When any man holds twixt hand and chin
A violin of mine, he will be glad
That Stradivari lived, made violins,
And made them of the best
For while God gives them skill,
I make them instruments to play upon,
God using me to help Him
If my hand slacked,
I should rob God, since He is fullest good,
Leaving a blank behind, instead of violins.
He could not make Antonio Stradivari's violins
Without Antonio."

No. He cannot do your work without you.

Look at the vast enterprises of the church. Here is a world to be won to God. The greatest enterprise in all human endeavor is that of sending the preacher, the teacher, the doctor, the nurse to fields afar, to tell men of the love of Jesus, that the will of God is that they might be saved; that a new life may come to them as it has come to us. That the abundant life of Jesus is the great message of the people of God. Do you say, they will be done -- in China, in Africa, in Japan,

in America? What do you mean? How shall that be done? Through another man's effort, through another woman's sacrifice, through another's time, through another's surrender, through another's money?

A number of years ago we were building a new church -- no matter where. One day a trustee was talking to me about the enterprise. He said: "Well, we'll soon have this thing up, finished; and then -- it's up to you, pastor, it's up to you." I made no answer. I was so heart-stricken, so crushed by the suggestion, that I went aside and wept over it. Up to me? And about him --? There came a day when he sat in my home, just a few days before I was to say goodbye to them all. Tears rolled down his cheeks, as he said: "I see it -- I see it. I told you it was up to you. I discovered it was up to us." Aye, God's will for that place was to be done through him as much as through me.

If the will of God is perfect, if it is an operating law for good, two things follow: It can never be changed. I don't want it changed. So -- prayer cannot change the will of God. Prayer does affect His His dealings, His methods of action. Perhaps I can say it in an easier way: Prayer may set free the will of God, enabling Him to do far more for me than is otherwise possible. I seek harmony with God! I pray that His will may be done; I long to do His will. And then, when defeat seems to stare me in the face, when the thing I long for seems impossible, I fling myself upon Him, and say, "Even so, Father, for it seemeth good in thy sight," not because of His unwillingness, but because of His inability -- there was no place for his will to operate.

I know this is a difficult place here; yet I may venture a little further to help you to appreciate the position I have taken. A son says to his father: "I want to keep close to you -- so that every day I may know your will; I yield myself to your will." What happens? Father and son are workers together. The father's actions toward the son are determined by the measure of his surrender. Many things can be done for the son which otherwise are impossible. But, suppose the son insists on his own way -- he defeats the will of his father, and the father's actions are determined accordingly.

Do you see how this brings prayer into an entirely new realm for some of us? Prayer does not move the hand that moves the world, but it makes possible the movements of the hand that moves the world. Prayer does not change the will of God; it makes possible the will of God. So prayer is work. Sometimes it is hard work. Prayer does not ask God to do what a human hand may do; it surrenders the hand to the guidance of God. They will be DONE -- here's my hand; here's my money; here's my life. Thy will be done -- be DONE!

This interpretation, which has been growing with me for many years, finds some support in that charming little book of Dr. Fosdick, "The Meaning of Prayer." Nothing I have ever read has helped me more, and I gladly acknowledge my indebtedness to him for his help in this troublesome question. I desire to repeat a few paragraphs from his book to show yet more clearly the growing thinking of men. Says Dr. Fosdick:

"One thing you can do. You can open the way for God to do what he wants to do. Prayer cannot change God's purpose but

but prayer can release it. God cannot do for the man with the closed heart what he can do for the man with the open heart. You can give God a chance to work his will in and for you and through you. Prayer is simply giving the wise and good God an opportunity to do what His wisdom and love want done....Christian prayer is giving God an opportunity to do what he wants, what he has been trying in vain, perhaps for years, to do in our lives, hindered by our unreadiness, our lack of receptivity, our closed hearts, and unresponsive minds. God stand over many lives, like the Master over Jerusalem, saying, 'How oft would I ... and ye would not.' True prayer changes that. It opens the door to the will of God. It does not change God's plan, but it does give God's plan gang-way. It is not begging from God; it is co-operation with God. In the luminous words of Archbishop Trench: 'We must not conceive of prayer as an overcoming of God's reluctance, but a laying hold of his highest willingness.'"

Brethren, I do not know whether you are entering into this interpretation -- this truth, may I say? -- or not; but its application is of such tremendous importance as to make one's being to its very center.

What is the will of God concerning us? "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." Are we ready to say, Amen; Thy will be done?

What is the will of God concerning the world? "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea." Are we ready to say, Amen; thy will be done?

What is the impelling command of Jesus? "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." Men and women of God, are we ready to say, Amen; thy will be done?

Thy will be done! It means the enlistment of life in bringing in the Kingdom of God; it means co-operation with God in the business of that Kingdom; it means the surrender of life to the sway of God's power. Shall we say, thy will be done -- in me -- now?