

## Thy Will Be Done

Matthew 6:10

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

We come today to the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, namely, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. It's similar to, and overlaps a good deal with, the two previous petitions. The three really inseparable: hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, and now, they will be done. "Thy will be done" is especially close to the immediately prior petition – thy kingdom come. This petition answers the question: what does it look like when the kingdom comes?

We will look at this then under two headings. The Matter and the Manner. By which we mean the thing, the stuff – that is, the will of God being done, and how, or the way, that it's to be done – on earth AS it is in heaven. The matter and the manner.

### I. The Matter

First, then, the matter. When we speak of the will of God, we traditionally make a distinction between what is called his secret will and his revealed will. It's important to get this right, so let's unpack it a bit.

By God's secret will, we are referring to his eternal decree, by which, he foreordains whatsoever come to pass. Essentially, this is the eternal plan of God, comprehending all things. It is according to this will, the secret will of God – that even Adam's fall is embraced, that not a sparrow falls, that Israel goes down into Egyptian bondage, that Jesus is delivered over to death. All things, great and small, are the unfolding of this plan of God, ordained from all eternity, freely and unchangeably. Even sin and evil are ordained and ordered by this will, for good and for God's glory. *This is, then, unthwartable will of God, the will by which, through his mighty providence, he rules and governs all his creatures and all their actions.*

And in our text, we are NOT talking about this will! There is no need to pray for this will to be done, for it is always done. We can distinguish this will of God, we said, from the will of God revealed in his Word. His precepts. The will of God that says things like: Love the Lord with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. It is this will that is resisted, ignored, despised, and not often done – and in fact NEVER done on earth, AS it is done in heaven. This will, the revealed will, is

what is in view, when we pray: thy will be done. In short, we are praying for obedience to God's commandments.

And let us remember that this will is exhaustive, and Jesus has already, in the Sermon on the Mount, raised the stakes concerning obedience to it, back in chapter 5. Where, remember, he said this:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Obedience is characteristic of kingdom life. It is what happens when the kingdom comes. And robust, comprehensive obedience characterizes those who would enter the kingdom. For of this entrance, our Lord said: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.' This obedience is what marks one out as belonging to the family of God in Jesus Christ. Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother, my sister, my mother. And it is to be counted among this family, to enter the eternal kingdom, that we pray here.

But of course, there is fierce opposition. Entrenched opposition. First and foremost, within us. This petition, our Larger Catechism says, assumes that, by nature, we are unable and unwilling to know and do God's will. In fact, we are prone to rebel against it, inclined to our own will, and to the will of the flesh and the devil. Of course, as redeemed, as new creatures in Christ, there is a breach, a break, with this nature, yet it still persists – and the flesh still wars against the spirit.

And so we pray – again from the Larger Catechism – that God would by his Spirit – take away from us --and others-- all blindness, weakness, perverseness of heart. That, by his grace, he would make us able and willing to know, do, and submit to his will in all things. So we pray here for a sovereign, supernatural, sustained action of the Spirit. Seeking for God himself to operate deep on our recalcitrant, broken and bent humanity, to bring forth the sweet fruit of joyful obedience.

To take this petition seriously means, in Paul's language: to present your bodies as a living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is our true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the

renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

That will, done, not just in external conformity to the commandments – though never less than that – that will, includes the deep interior recesses of our souls. The hidden work of pruning and breaking up fallow ground, the divine digging that produces the fruit of Spirit. The Spirit's work making us obedient in the unseen realm of the heart's motives and meditations. Thus, Luther called this a fearful petition. For, we are praying here to have our wills broken and aligned with God's. We are asking for the will of God to overcome our willfulness. In short, we are praying to be conquered by the Spirit. To pray this petition is to say: May the words of my mouth AND the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

## **II. The Manner**

And this brings us to our second point, the manner, the way in which God's will is to be done. The key word, to see just HOW God's will is to be done, is AS. Thy will be done on earth AS – in the same manner -- that it is done in heaven. And this means, we want the will of God to be done perfectly, or, as the Shorter Catechism says, as it is done by the angels in heaven.

So what does this mean? It means, as we said, that the manner of doing God's will, is a big part of doing God's will. Here is some of the language used by our catechisms on this point: The will of God is to be done entirely, without pretense, without wavering, without delay, fervently, always, without complaint. With humility, cheerfulness, diligence, faithfulness, sincerity, constancy. In other words, flawlessly, from a pure heart for the glory of God alone. As it is done by the angels.

And how is God's will done by the angels (or, for that manner, by the departed saints who are also in heaven)? It is done with ease, with perfection, with delight, perpetually. There is no disobedience, no partial obedience, by the angelic hosts. Here's Psalm 103: Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. There is no cessation of adoration, for they perpetually behold the face of the Father, and the hosts of heaven perpetually cry aloud:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come. A similar cry, from the Seraphim, is seen by Isaiah, when he is lifted up into the heavenly temple.

The angels render fully obedient service and perpetual worship. There is no disobedience, no sluggishness, no imperfections – no respite - in the service of God's heavenly court. We are not – primarily at least – we are not praying

primarily for things to get better on earth. Or even for them to get much better. We are praying for utter consummated perfection. For the will of God to be done on earth AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. Not somewhat like or a little closer to the way its done in heaven. Why pray for the game to go a bit more in your favor, when you can pray for complete victory in the game? We are praying for unvarnished, unstained, radiant righteousness to dwell in the earth.

Here we should note that almost certainly the phrase at the end of v.10 – on earth as it is in heaven – applies to all three petitions before it. Thus, the prayer could be said this way: hallowed be your name-- on earth as it is in heaven, your kingdom come-- on earth and it is in heaven, and here: your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This phrase – as it is in heaven – bends the whole of the prayer to the end – to the culmination of history, to heaven itself, and to the tearing of the veil between heaven and earth. In the words of the great Puritan, Thomas Watson, on this petition: We have here that which makes us long to be in heaven, where we shall do God's will perfectly as the angels do. Alas! How defective we are in our obedience here! How far we fall short! But in heaven we shall do God's will perfectly, as the angels in glory.

“On earth AS it is in heaven” means we are praying for a time when obedience will not have to be set in opposition to evil – for there is no evil in heaven – or in opposition to ongoing sin – for there is no sin in heaven. For an obedience that will not be framed in the context of hate or lust or anger or enemies or persecution. For when God's will is done, on earth AS it is done in heaven – all opposition will have been abolished. It sounds too otherworldly to us. Almost utopian. Here we are with our broken obedience, not to mention our continual disobedience.

And we are given this astonishingly broad vision, this petition that earth and heaven be one in splendid, effortless obedience. But, if we are to move forward rightly, we must see that the will of God HAS been done on earth – and that, in the teeth of evil and resistance, human and demonic – in the life of Jesus Christ.

And, as usual, the best illustration of Jesus' teaching is Jesus himself. In fact, in this age, he is the only perfect illustration, the only perfect embodiment, of his teaching. For him, this petition summarizes his entire human existence.

“For I have come down from heaven, he says, not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me.” “My food, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” By myself I can do nothing; for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.” This is the One, who, sweating blood in Gethsemane, three times prayed: My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” That is thy will be done. That is the One who taught the

prayer, living out the agonizing cost of heeding the petition. He rendered obedience – joyful, perfect, personal, exact and entire obedience.

This is the obedience rendered on earth – which secures the fact, that it shall one day be rendered on earth, AS it is rendered in heaven. The life-giving achievement of Jesus, the rendering of the obedience Adam and all of us in Adam, failed, and still fail, to render – this achievement, is all the more glorious because it was done in the hostile, fallen environment, created by our sin. It is that will – the fully obedient will of Jesus – which has sanctified you. It is that will which subdues your willfulness. Which, through the Spirit – as we pray this very prayer – bends back our wayward, alienated, twisted wills. It is that will which blots out your sinfulness, and which will, finally, perfect you in holiness. For without holiness, without conformity to the divine will, no one shall see God.

So we must flee to Jesus. For in, and with, and through him, we live. And only the gospel, the gospel of another's obedience, the power of God for salvation, can truly change us here. We must cling to his obedience (it is our only hope), we must rest in it, and we must pray for it to be reflected and fleshed out in us – both the matter of it – the divine will – and the manner of it – as it is done in heaven. For that climactic phrase of the first three petition of the Lord's Prayer – as it is done in heaven. That phrase drives us to pray in new ways. To pray as eschatological people. To pray as heavenly people. To pray as people waiting for the realities of heaven to be made the realities of earth.

And thus, there is no petition which should cause us to value the obedience, even unto death, of Jesus Christ, more than this petition. And no petition should cause us to take the Christian moral life more seriously than this petition. For we are summoned here to deep transformation. To refusing to accept the stagnant moral status quo of our Christian lives. We pray, earnestly, then, for God to work in us what is well pleasing in his sight. For we are seeking to yield an obedience which cannot be distinguished from that rendered by the angels. And thus, to pray this prayer, is to perpetually, fervently pray: "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!"

May God himself, sanctify you through and through (entirely, without remainder). May your whole spirit, whole soul and your whole body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Day when the will of God will be done on earth AS it is done in heaven. Amen.

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