

# Seeking God's Will

*Turning to Biblical Prayer*

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 6:10  
**Preached on:** Tuesday, September 3, 2024

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It is my privilege to invite you to turn to the book of Matthew chapter 6 for our message this evening as we continue our study of what is known as the Lord's Prayer in verses 9 through 13, and I'd like to start by simply reading the whole prayer and then we'll do a little bit of review and then look at verse 10 again. Matthew 6, verse 9, Jesus said,

9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Now, on Sunday, I tried to make the point that this prayer is not teaching us how to bend God's will to ours, rather, this is a prayer in which, through an earnest consideration of the six different petitions that Jesus gives us, it teaches us to bend our will to God, and the point of prayer is not to get God to do what we want, but to seek him, and to seek him in different ways with different spiritual virtues that we've been talking about. The first message in this series we titled, "Seeking the Father," based on the simple way that we address God in prayer according to our Lord, "Our Father." It's a spirit of trust that we have when we come to prayer. The book of Hebrews says that he who comes to God must believe that he is and he is a rewarder of those who seek him, so that we trust God and we believe that as we pray we are not wasting our time, but that God as a Father actually hears us, listens to us, cares for us, and somehow responds to us when we pray. We're grateful for that, and so we're seeking the Father. Secondly, the second message was titled, "Seeking God's Glory." The object of prayer is to honor God supremely, not to get our earthly needs satisfied or sometimes more often our earthly wants gratified. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name," the glory of God being the focus of true prayer and an attitude of reverence. And then on Sunday, we titled the message "Seeking God's Kingdom," a sense of anticipation knowing that Christ is going to come again and introduce an entire radical change to the world order and what we know now in this world will not always be; Christ will come and he will establish his reign on the earth. And so there's a sense of anticipation that informs true prayer.

Now let me just say, lest it seem a little bit overwhelming, I'm not suggesting in anything throughout this series that every single one of those attitudes must be thoroughly engaged every time you pray. There are places for very short, brief prayers as we walk through the day. Think of what Nehemiah said when the king asked him, you know, "Why is your face sad?" And he said, "I prayed to the Lord." In the moment, he prayed wanting to have wisdom in the moment to respond to the king at a vulnerable and strategic time. He wasn't going through all six of these attitudes and said, "Well, King, hang on a second. I need to go through trust and reverence and anticipation and all of these other things before I respond to you." This is what we do when we're digging a very deep well to draw upon, and we draw upon different attitudes at different times in life, different seasons of life, different times in the day, but all of this should somehow be informing the fundamental disposition that we have toward prayer. That's the idea.

You know, I'm kind of deliberately using the verbal form "seeking" here as we go through all six of these petitions. This idea of seeking is found in chapter 6, verse 33. Look at it here with me. Jesus said at the end of his teaching on anxiety, he said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." This idea of looking for something, pursuing something, going after something that is worthwhile to go after. And so we seek the person of the Father, we seek the glory of God, we seek the kingdom, we pursue these things from our heart, and as you read on in the Sermon on the Mount, you see this theme of seeking brought up again, Matthew 7, verses 7-11. Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." And so as we ask, we expect an answer. As we seek, we expect a discovery. As we knock, we expect an answer from the other side. Verse 8, "For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" And so based on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, based on the infallible authority of the word of God, based on the promise of God, we have every reason to approach God in prayer with a sense of expectation, with a sense of anticipation, that I am doing something here that is worthwhile, that when I pray I am pursuing the highest thing that a man could do during his course of life on earth and during the course of his day. I am communing with God at his command and at his promise with an expectation that this will be something fruitful and that there will be a finding, there will be a reward on the other side, that I'm not simply going through a motion so that I can check the box on my devotional list. I'm not simply doing something for the sake of doing it so that I feel better about myself or that I get a psychological boost from the act of praying. No, that's a terribly wrong way to think about praying, that when we pray, there is an earnest laying forth of our heart before God and Scripture, Jesus tells us right here in the context of the Lord's Prayer, that the Lord sees, the Lord hears when we do this.

Look at Matthew 6, verse 6. Chapter 6, verse 6, that we're praying to a knowing, engaged, involved God when we do. Verse 6, "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret

will reward you." He will reward you because he sees you praying in a humble way, and he will reward you because he hears you when you pray. The God who made your organ of sight, the God who made the eye, sees. The God who made your organ of hearing, the God who made your ear, hears. The God who made your mind knows. And so when we come to him, he sees, he hears, he knows, and he promises that this praying is not in vain. It is his intention to reward us when we pray and so we have every reason to seek him with the expectation that as a good father, gives good things to his children, so God will give good things to his children when they pray.

And so, as you read, sometimes you read, if you read about the course of revivals over the course of time, you'll find that there was an earnest seeking that was often going on in prayer, a sense of anticipation, expectation as people sought the blessing of God on the preaching of the word of God, seeking the movement of the Spirit in the hearts of men to save them and to convert them and to sanctify and purify the church and all of those things. Somehow there's a spiritual dynamic here that is real, that is living, that is active. James said in James 5, the prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. And so our responsibility, and beloved, I'm probably not too far off in what I'm about to say, I think perhaps one of the glaring failures of Christians like us is that when we pray, we're not really praying with any kind of sense of expectation. Perhaps. Anyway, it's certainly at least a good question to ask yourself, do I expect this to matter? Do I expect God to respond? And if not, then what am I doing? If I'm not conscious of an anticipation and an expectation that God will respond, then what do I do with the passage we read in Matthew 7 that he gives good things to his children who ask? What do I do with that? What do I do with Matthew 6:33 that says seek and all these things will be added to you? There's a sense of expectation that should inflame our prayers and it's an expectation that is grounded in the revelation of God found in the word of God, the promise of God given in the word of God, the promise that came from the lips of our Lord. He wasn't saying these things to taunt us. He wasn't saying these things to mock us and to see us go through life seeking but not finding, asking but not receiving. He says the exact opposite.

And so perhaps it's a measure of our, you know, a measure of our faith, maybe it's a measure of the vitality of our faith is whether we have some kind of sense of expectation and anticipation when we pray or not, or if that thought never really even comes across our mind. And should it not be obvious also, beloved, these things that we're talking about here this evening, really, really vital. It would be amazing, it would be truly, truly exciting if these things actually took root in the heart of Truth Community Church and that we prayed and acted on them even more. We're standing on the shoreline looking out at an ocean of blessing, looking at a tide that could come in, but if we want that tide to come in, we have to first examine our hearts and realize that the one who seeks him must believe that he's a rewarder of those who seek him, that we're praying, anticipating something to happen in response. Now, it's not that we go and we say, "Well, I want X to happen, and so I'll pray for X, and then X will happen." No, it's not like that. We're not praying according to our wisdom, asking God to do our will, remember? We talked about that pretty plainly. But if we go and pray and say, "Lord, we ask you for your glory to do a work among your people, to purify and cleanse us and to sanctify us," well, we would expect God to answer that. That's a prayer according to his will. If we prayed and said,

"Lord, you know, in the next 12 months, by the first Sunday in September, we would like to see X number of souls come to faith in Christ," well, maybe we get the number, maybe we don't, but there would be an expectation that God would not simply ignore that prayer and turn his back on it.

And if you look at James for just a moment, there's a lot of parallels between James and the Sermon on the Mount, and I'm just kind of giving you the overflow of my heart here in this introduction. But Scripture tells us that Scripture would screen us, let's say, screen, S-C-R-E-E-N, it would screen us before we come to God. And James, in chapter 1, verse 5, in the context of praying in the midst of trials, he says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." This wisdom will be given in response to your prayer, but he goes on and makes the same point that I'm trying to make here, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind."

So, beloved, as we come to look at this matter that we're going to see in verse 10, you know, I just ask you, I just ask you, when you pray, will you honor God with a sense of trust and expectation, casting aside doubt as you pray, saying, "God, I'm not wasting my time here. You would not taunt me like that. You're not a God like that. You're a good God that responds to prayer. It's written all over your word. It's written all over what Jesus says. And Lord, I'm trying to grow in my inner man, in the attitudes of trust and reverence and anticipation and submission and dependence and repentance. I want to grow in these things, Father. I know I'm an infant in the school of faith. I realize, Father, the truth of the matter is that I should be in graduate school by now. How long have I been a Christian, Lord? How many years, how many decades have I been a Christian? And how weak and faltering and doubting and suspicious is my attitude towards you? Father, I repent of all of that and in response to what I see in your word here, I now come to you with a sense of expectation that you are a good God who hears prayer, you see me when I pray, you promise to reward me, and in reliance on that, let's go."

Imagine how different praying would be with the simplicity and directness of that attitude. That's what Scripture calls us to and cultivates in us and we don't have to drift anywhere near the "name it and claim it" error to have a biblical attitude in prayer. We don't have to go to charismatic excesses or to even fear them if we're grounding ourselves in the word of God and praying in direct response to his word. So why wouldn't we do that? And there's a sense of, this is a word that our culture today does not like, if we feel a sense of shame in seeing these things and saying, "You know what, I don't pray that way. I don't pray with those attitudes at all." Let that sense of shame be something that would spark an attitude of repentance in us to pray differently, to pray earnestly, to pray well, and to pray in accordance with what the Lord has instructed us to do and then see what happens.

So, with that in mind, let's look at verse 10 in particular here. We saw on Sunday, we looked at the phrase, "Your kingdom come," and now we turn our attention to the second half of verse 10, where Jesus says, "Pray this way, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And so, remember who it is that we're praying to. We're praying to our Father in

heaven, the God who is near, and also the God who transcends us, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loves us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, that God who loves us is a God, he is a person. He is a God that has his own volition. He has his own will, and we're going to look at a couple of aspects of his will in just a moment. But we're coming to a living person when we pray to God, a real personality, if I can use that term, someone with thought and awareness and personality, to keep emphasizing that word, I guess. We're not praying to fate. We're not praying to a statue carefully painted to look its best. We're not praying to an object. We're praying to the living God who tells us to come and pray, and as we remember who he is, the Father in heaven, who is exalted and glorious, and yet personal and real and loving, we remember that his will is what we're seeking. We seek to know and to submit to his will. And so Jesus says, "God, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and actually, in the original language, it's the order that's reversed, "as in heaven, so also upon earth. Father, your will is done perfectly by those around you in heaven, by the angels in heaven. You know, they all obey your will without hesitation, and your will is perfectly executed. When sin occurred in heaven, Satan and all of his cohorts were kicked out. And so, Father, I long for an environment like that to come down on earth and to be expressed in my heart and in the things around me."

And so, in heaven, God's will is obeyed perfectly, and when we pray, then what we are doing, what we are engaging our will to do is to conform our heart to that, to that perfect manifestation of the will of God in heaven. That's what we want. That's what we seek. We are seeking God's will in that way. And beloved, we pray not to change the will of God when things, from our perspective, seem to be going off course, we're not praying to change the will of God, but to submit to it. We're not trying to get God to do what we want, we're coming to God to conform ourselves to what he wants.

And, you know, as I've been meditating on these things, preparing to speak on them here over the past day or two and just thinking through it, you know, if we could only see these things from the right perspective, all that I'm saying here in this moment would be perfectly evident and obvious. Let's remember the displays of the glory of God in like Isaiah 6 and the angels are flying about saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." Isaiah saw that and he said, "I've seen the glory of the Lord, I'm undone." The disciples saw the glory of Christ at the transfiguration, and they were overwhelmed by the sight of it. And on and on you could go, but just the overwhelming sense of the glory of God and the knowledge that he is sovereignly wise, he is completely omniscient, he is completely omnipotent, he is an uncreated God who spoke the worlds into existence by the power of his own word, just by the exercise of his word expressed by his spoken command when there was nothingness from an earthly perspective, when there was nothing and time itself did not exist at that moment, if I can put it that way, and then he speaks, and over the course of six days, he creates the heavens and the earth out of his own wisdom. Scripture asks the rhetorical question in the book of Job, "Who was the counselor of the Lord that gave him the wisdom to do these things?" God didn't go to a library, you know, in the old days, pull out an old volume of Encyclopedia Britannica, say, "Creation, how do you do that?" And he flips through the pages to find it out. He didn't have to call a hotline to consult, say, "I'm thinking about doing something, what's

your opinion?" With no outside input, he did all of that and hung the earth on nothing, and put billions of galaxies of billions of stars rotating throughout the cosmic sphere. Let that sink in. That's the God that we're praying to. How foolish of us, how foolish of us to think that the best thing that we could do when we go into prayer is to say, "God, I've got this problem and here's how I think you should fix it." Excuse me? Who are we talking to? Does he need our advice? Does he need our counsel? To ask the question is to answer it, isn't it?

And so, rather than impatiently dictating to God what we think his next step and course of action ought to be, what if we prayed completely differently? What if we prayed biblically? I think it's 2 Chronicles 20, verse 12, Jehoshaphat prayed, "Lord, we don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you." Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight." Rather than praying according to our understanding and what we think would be wise, what if we didn't rely on our own understanding at all and we just came and said, "God, in the immensity of your wisdom, in the immensity of your goodness, I'm here in this situation and I just bow before you and I worship you and I seek your will to be accomplished, whatever that may be. If you have willed it, it is by definition good. I seek that. And I humble myself before you enough that I'm not even going to suggest an answer to you. I'm so confident in your goodness and your wisdom and your care of every detail of mine down to the number of hairs on my head that I'm just content to just put myself in your hands and your presence and to leave it there." What if we prayed that way a little bit? Sure simplify a whole lot of things.

I haven't heard anyone say this to me recently and so I'm not reflecting on anybody here in the room at all, or even anyone on the live stream at all. But in past days, I remember people who would say incessantly, "You know, I need to figure out what I'm going to pray for. I have to know what to ask for." And they're wanting to figure out the situation in advance so that they can pray to that end. I know that's the mindset, "You know, I need to know how to pray," and by which people mean, you know, what direction the circumstances should go. What a foolish thing. We who have no wisdom, we who are wisps of wind, we who have no knowledge of the future, we don't even know if we're going to be here tomorrow and we're going to try to tell God what to do in the future, who the next president ought to be or whatever? Well, what if God's working out a bigger plan than what we see and if we saw the whole thing, we wouldn't be able to process it anyway? Do not lean on your own understanding, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." And so we ask for the will of God to be done.

Let's talk about the will of God for a moment. We do well to remember that the will of God has two aspects to it. There are two aspects to the will of God. They're different from one another. God has a secret will. Deuteronomy 29:29, the things that are revealed belong to us, but the things that are hidden belong to God. The secret will of God refers to his decree by which he determines everything that will happen in the universe, and we'll illustrate this in a moment. For now, I just want you to distinguish two things in your mind. There is a secret will of God that is known only to him as he works out

everything that is occurring in the world and in your life and in the lives of your loved ones. God has a wise purpose that he predetermined, and he is directing everything to accomplish that will of his and the means by which he works out that will is his providence, his secret will. Now, there's another aspect to the will of God, that's his, we could call it his moral will, his revealed will. His moral will refers to the biblical commands that he gives to mankind and he gives to his people that we are to obey if we would live rightly before him.

There's two different things. The will of God, for example, it says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, the will of God is your sanctification, that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality. That is the revealed will of God that is to be obeyed. That's different from the secret will by which God, for example, raises up kingdoms and casts them down. The moral will of God is reflected in the Ten Commandments, reflected in the teaching of the New Testament to the church. These are the things that God has declared from his position of authority, from the Lordship of Christ that says, "I have created you for this purpose and this is who you shall be and this is what you shall do. This is what you shall not be and what you shall not do." The moral will of God. That distinction will help us see the significance of this verse here in verse 10, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

And so what is Jesus teaching us when he commands this prayer? It's two aspects of submission that I'm going to lay out for you in the remainder of our time here this evening. First of all, we're going to talk about submission to God's secret will, you could almost say submission to his providence, but since we're talking in the realm of the will, we'll say the submission to God's secret will, and then secondly, submission to God's moral will. Now, let's talk about the secret will of God here, first of all. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Now, God's secret will is clearly taught in Scripture, and that it is a comprehensive plan that he is working out over the course of human history is unmistakably clear. In Ephesians 1:11, we read that God works all things after the counsel of his own will. God works all things after the counsel of his own will. He determined in eternity past the course that he wanted all things to take, and now, based on that predetermined will, he is working everything out in accordance with that so that not one aspect, one detail, one molecule of his will fails in any respect whatsoever. God's secret will is comprehensive. God's secret will covers everything in the universe and everything in life, and so whether you want to think about uncertain health, uncertain relationships, uncertain politics, we gather all of that up and 10,000 other things beside and we remember a verse like Romans 8:28 that says, we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. All things, beloved. All things after the counsel of his will. All things together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. There is nothing outside the comprehensive will of God. He hasn't made all of that known to us. We don't know the unfolding of events. We don't know the outcome of the souls of those that we love. But by the providence of God, he orchestrates all the details of all of life, of all of his creatures, of all time, without exception and without fail.

Look at what Jesus says just a little later in the chapter, in verse 26. "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father

feeds them." The details of it. Verse 28, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like that." Verse 30, "if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" The point being that "all things" means all things; everything means all without exception. God is working all of that out according to his good will. And beloved, if you know God to be a holy, righteous, just, good, gracious, loving, merciful, patient God, as you say that you do, and if that God is the God of everything, working it all out according to his will and to his good purpose, then shouldn't it be obvious that he can be trusted with things that you don't understand? Shouldn't it be obvious that you should come in an attitude of grateful, anticipatory submission to that glorious will of his as the framing disposition with which you approach all of life and which informs your fundamental disposition in prayer.

The teaching of Christ, the effect of this teaching of Christ is that that understanding of who God is and how he works out his will should inform the way that we pray. And look, this is gloriously ennobling and empowering to you, for all of us. The deep sorrows of life that can't be changed, swallowed up in that glorious will of God's. I don't understand why it had to be sorrowful. I don't understand why God hasn't answered your prayers for the salvation of your loved ones. But I know who he is and I know that whatever he does is right and good by definition, and that he's working all that out, and the final chapter, for many, have not been written, and if that loved one, as you know about me, has died apparently without Christ, well, okay. I trust God for that, you say. I don't have to dwell in darkness, in soul darkness over that. And if the doctors aren't helping, if the spouse is not who he or she should be, "God, I have a refuge here. I have a fortress that I can go in and my soul can be safe. I have a rock that I can go and stand upon. I have an unsinkable ship in the storm knowing the good will of a good God." And so, it informs the way we pray. "God, I don't know the future. Left to myself, I would be fearful. God, I don't control the future. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. God, things are happening that I don't like and that I don't understand in my human capacity. But Lord, I take that little bottle of discontent and uncertainty and a lack of clarity, I take that little bottle and I pour it out on the altar before you in your presence. I believe you. I trust you. I know that you are somehow working out things in ways that I don't understand, and therefore I submit to you as you work out your will. Father, your will be done. Given who you are, given what you do, your will be done. Father, I accept that. I trust you. I submit myself to you as you do your divine will."

That's how you pray. You see, beloved, the real battle in prayer, the real battle in prayer is not to wrestle with God to make him do what you want him to do. The battle is far more noble, far more glorious, and far more difficult. The battle is to bring your heart into submission and contentment with the fact that God is who he is and he does what he does, and that's enough, to be content to say, "Not my will, Lord, but yours be done." It's a lot easier, in some respects, it's a lot easier to try to tell God what to do. Then you don't have to confront the contrary, sinful, rebellious, untrusting impulses of your own heart. "Father, I may not understand, I may not like it, but I submit myself to you as you do your divine will. I take my person and I submit it to you. I bow before you in every

respect. I bow before your sovereign throne and I pray your will be done. I don't need to know anything else. I don't need to know," listen to me, beloved, "I don't need to know in advance what the outworking of your will is. I'm not asking to know in advance that it comes out like I want. God, in the midst of my present uncertainty and lack of knowledge, I want you to know I submit to you now because you are worthy of my trust and submission no matter what. I give you my submission unconditionally. I don't hold my submission back until I know the outcome. I submit now. And to the extent that there's bubblings in my heart that are contrary to that, Lord, I put my hand over my mouth and I refuse to let those things speak because I just trust you and your secret will."

So, beloved, as you watch life unfold, as you watch events unfold, as you go along in life and the storms and the billows seem to get bigger and bigger as you go along, this is the direction that the Lord would take you in prayer, "Your will be done." That orients your heart and aligns you with his purposes and here's the effect of that in your heart, the effect of that is it produces patient endurance as you go. It stills the raging waters of discontentment and exchanges them for the placid peace of resting on the promises and the purposes of God. Patient endurance, "Your will be done." Scripture says that it's through faith and patience that we inherit the promises.

Now secondly, we've seen submission to God's secret will, secondly, submission to God's moral will. We need to consider that aspect of this as well. As we said, God's moral will refers to his revealed will found alone in the Scriptures. You don't add to this word, you don't take away from this word. God has made his will known in the Bible, and only in the Bible. And so, you know, God has expressed his directives, his commands that we must obey if we were to live righteously before him and, you know, the supreme, in some ways, the supreme command would be to believe in Christ in order to be saved. You know, the gospel command comes as a moral imperative and says, "Believe in Christ." You are commanded to repent and believe in the gospel. I mean, you start there. I mean, if someone isn't obedient to the very entry point into reconciliation with God, then what's the point of talking about any other aspect of it?

But when we talk about God's moral will, there's something different going on here that we need to kind of think through here. God's secret will is always accomplished without fail but God's moral will is another matter altogether. Men violate God's moral will all the time, don't they? If you were to hold up the Ten Commandments against society, you would see that those two tablets of the law are being shattered day after day, moment after moment. And frankly, with a right understanding of the Ten Commandments, if you held them up beside yourself in the bathroom mirror, we've taught on the Ten Commandments, we know that there's an inner force, an inner authority to the Ten Commandments. It goes beyond just not, you know, not committing murder and not committing adultery. You hold those Ten Commandments up to yourself and say, "Wow, you know what? I've broken every one of these."

A few years ago, no longer at our church, but there was some interaction with someone, and it was endearing. It was endearing in the innocence with which something was said. This person said, "I've broken some of the Ten Commandments," thinking he was making

a big admission there, you know, "Okay, I admit it, I've broken some of the commandments." Well, Scripture says if you've broken one, you've broken them all, so we've got a little bit of growing here to do, that's okay. But my point is, is that you hold up the word of God and you look at yourself in the mirror with the Ten Commandments beside you, you realize that I myself have broken this moral will of God throughout the course of my life. Here's a question that we need to answer carefully: does the fact that men violate and break the moral will of God, does that hinder the purpose of his secret will? How can we say God's will is being done if God's will is not being done? Well, that's where we've got to have the two aspects of the will of God in mind because Scripture teaches us, in a way that far transcends our understanding, that even when men violate the moral will of God, he is still fulfilling his secret will in ways that transcend what we can know and understand.

So, for example, Joseph could say to his brothers in Genesis 50, verse 20, "You meant evil against me." They were sinning, breaking God's moral commandment when they sold Joseph into slavery. They sinned against God when they did that, and Joseph recognizes that and sets forth their accountability for their sin, but he says at the same time, in the exact same breath, he said, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this result. God used your wicked actions to do a good thing, to put me in Egypt, so that by the wisdom he's given to me, I could help a nation and those surrounding survive a seven-year famine."

Look at the book of Acts 2. Acts 2 in verses 22 and 23, at the climax of God's redemptive purpose in the crucifixion of Christ, we read this, as Peter preaches to those who crucified Christ and sinned as they did so, accusing him falsely and punishing him and crucifying him unjustly by human standards. Peter preaches to them in Acts 2:22 and says, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know--this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." This was according to the perfect plan of God, but you in your own actions and from your own heart were sinning as you did it. God overruled your sinful actions. God even used your sinful actions. Without forcing you to do it, God used that to bring about the payment of the redemption price on the cross.

And so, beloved, I think this helps: God's secret will is broader than his moral will. His secret will encompasses all of the violations of his moral will to achieve his purpose. For the purpose of praying, as we do here, recognizing that there is a moral aspect to the will of God and bringing it down and having dealt with the quandary of the difficulty, let's just come back to you alone with God, praying, "Father, your will be done." What's the heart of that really saying? When you pray, "your will be done," you are expressing submission to God's moral will. "Father, I place my will under yours." To state it simply, this prayer expresses a heart commitment, a heart orientation toward obedience. "God, your word says this, this, and this, and I embrace my responsibility to follow." Where you have sinned and there is no man who never sins, "In light of your moral will, Father, I confess my sin and I repent. And as I look to the future, I submit to your word and I

incline my heart to obedience. And Lord," even wrapped around that should just be a recognition and a confession of hypocrisy, saying, "God, I realize I have voiced these words before and then just gone out and continued wallowing in the slop of my sin. God, what am I to say? I confess all of that, and I just humble myself before you." But beloved, this tests the integrity of our prayer lives. If we pray in trust in reverence, if we're seeking the kingdom of God, then integrity before the omniscient God means that we come with a heart that is willing to obey his word, to follow his moral will in life.

And so to wrap all of this up, in the brief time we have remaining here, we pray, "Father, your will be done," saying, "Father, I trust you as you work out your plan according to your secret will. Father, your will be done. I will walk in obedience to what you have revealed in your word to the best of my ability. And when I stray, I submit to your correction. I submit to your discipline. I submit and embrace the responsibility to know your word better so that I might have a more thorough knowledge of what your revealed will is." But beloved, let me just remind you as you pray this way, when we pray, "your will be done," we're really saying, "Lord, I'm not in control here, and I embrace that." This prayer does away with the autonomous mindset of modern man and reduces him to ashes before God saying, "I put myself and everything about me and I put my own volition in your hands under you."

Well, there's a great encouragement as we respond to this command to pray this way; it's just remembering the way that Jesus prayed in Gethsemane. We have a Lord who walked through this on earth himself and knows what it's like facing the certain outworking of the will of the Father for the life of the Son as he was on the brink of going to Calvary, he says, "Father, if it's possible to let this cup pass from me, let it be, but nevertheless not my will but thine be done." Dear friends, dear friends, if our Lord himself prayed that way, if our Lord himself submitted to the Father in prayer, what does that say for us? That we should follow in like path. It also teaches us something else. You can turn to Hebrews 4 as we bring this plane in for a landing here. Our Lord Jesus, our Lord Jesus knows by personal experience that this prayer, "your will be done," often comes at a price, at a personal cost, that we submit to that which might be painful to us, and Scripture teaches us that he sympathizes with us as we pray. He knows what it's like to pray this prayer. He is actually at the right hand of God interceding for us as we mouth our stumbling, stammering words and he represents us at the right hand of God as our great high priest, as our advocate, as our mediator, taking, and along with the Holy Spirit, taking our stammering prayers and translating them into something that is powerful at the throne of God as the Father hears the prayer of his responsive, obedient children.

Hebrews 4:14-16 says, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." Now watch what it says here in verse 16 and realize everything that we've said about the Spirit tonight and then throughout the course of this exposition over the past several messages about the sense of anticipation, a sense of expectation, a sense of certainty that this is valuable in the sight of God, all of that is affirmed by these words that we're about to read in Hebrews 4:16, "Let

us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Let's pray together.

*Father, we take just a moment to quiet our hearts before the sovereign God of the universe who is simultaneously our heavenly Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we confess the feeble, heartless, mechanical, cold way that we have all so often prayed, going through a motion without emotion, going through, thoughtlessly speaking mindless words without really even considering to whom we're praying or what we're even saying or trying to do. Father, help us by your Spirit. We forsake all of that before your throne. We know we have no strength to change all of this and that without Christ we can do nothing, but Father, in light of all that you have said in your word and all that we've heard here this evening from Scripture, we quiet our hearts in submission to your providence in our lives. We accept it all, Father. Every good thing, every difficult thing, we accept it all, knowing that you don't send anything to us apart from your good will. And Father, we look at the high standard of righteousness set forth in your word, we realize we all fall short of your glory, and in light of all of these things, Father, with simplicity and sincerity of heart, we look to the future, we look to the rest of this evening even, and we earnestly pray your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We trust you, Father. We submit to you, Father. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.*

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