

# Thy Will Be Done

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Recorded on November 17, 2018

Back in August when I spoke down in Kennewick, we examined the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ from Jesus' own testimony, primarily in the book of John, the first eight chapters. We ended in John 20:21, which is the last reference that Jesus makes concerning the fact that He was sent by the Father. Let's note what it says. Chapter 20:21 of John. Jesus appears to them, verse 19:

**John 20:19** *Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."*  
20) *When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*  
21) *So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* (NKJV)

This was a brief review of how Jesus described the fact that His Father had sent Him. This is important, because Jesus didn't come with any personal initiative, He came to do the work and the will of the Father, and He said as much. The will and the work are of Him who sent Me, He said. He also stated the Father grants to the Son life and judgment. I do nothing of Myself, He said. I have come in My Father's name, My doctrine is His who sent Me. My Father taught Me, I speak what I have seen of My Father, the truth which I heard from God. So once again, He says, as the Father has sent Me, I send you. God has given us the instruction on the approach we need to take and we need to just follow through on that. Jesus brought nothing original in the sense that His entire ministry and message was God-centered. It's important for us to remember that. So the title of the sermon today is:

## Thy Will Be Done

We focus on what happened and how God continues to do His work and what it means for us. Doing the will of God can sometimes be a rather challenging prospect for we mere humans and it's good that we focus on God's instruction. Let's notice when we read chapter 20, verse 21, this is post resurrection. Jesus has been crucified, He's been resurrected, He comes back into the midst of His disciples and He says, as the Father sent Me so I send you. Let's notice a couple of things before we get there, before He was crucified. Let's turn to Revelation 13. This seems to be a bit of a strange place to reveal this important point but nevertheless here it is. We're talking about the time of the end and some of the difficulties that will be encountered on the earth. In verse 1 for example:

**Revelation 13:1** *Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. (NKJV)*

So there's this great beast, and the latter part of verse 2 says:

2) *...The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. (NKJV)*

So the dragon, who's the devil, we're told in chapter 12, gives this beast his power. So we know where the origin is and we can expect trouble. The latter part of verse 3.

3) *... And all the world marveled and followed the beast. (NKJV)*

This is a one-world religion marveling after this beast.

4) *So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (NKJV)*

The events that take place are going to be so spectacular that the entire world will look to this beast, stirred up and supported by the devil himself, and the whole world will worship him. Verse 8 we want to focus on here.

8) *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, [that will be an interesting set of circumstances, won't it?] whose names have not been written in the Book of Life [notice] of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (NKJV)*

It was God's will and even from the very beginning, it was known there were going to be difficulties and there would have to be a sacrifice. It would be a Lamb and of course that Lamb, that sacrifice, would be Jesus Christ. So when we read in chapter 20, Christ has been crucified and He's been resurrected, and He appears to them. Let's go back to Mark 15 and notice a little more detail about the final events in His life as He carried out the will of His Father.

**Mark 15:33** *Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. (NKJV)*

Jesus is being crucified now.

34) *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (NKJV)*

Continuing in verse 37,

37) *And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.*

- 38) *Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*  
39) *So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (NKJV)*

A question I have here at this juncture is, did God really forsake Him? Did He just leave Him to Himself and forsake him in this great hour of trial and trauma? You can ask yourself the question, have you ever been in a situation, facing a serious trial or difficulty, in which you maybe felt that God may have forsaken you? Let you down in a difficult situation? In spite of your prayers and in spite of your seeking God's guidance and intervention, it just seems like He's nowhere present. There's a solution to these things. First of all, we'll check Hebrews 13 briefly because here it's stated in no uncertain terms; Hebrews 13:5, we're instructed:

**Hebrews 13:5** *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (NKJV)*

So Jesus cries out, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? In Hebrews we're told (in my Bible there's a reference to Deuteronomy and another one in Genesis, in Joshua and then later in the Psalms, and now here in Hebrews, where the promise is repeated, in different circumstances, to different people), I will never leave you nor forsake you. So let's consider Jesus' position, let's go back to chapter 14 for a moment. God doesn't forsake us but sometimes it may seem like He has. We're trying to do God's will, we have to give God credit for knowing what's best all the way around, so we find ourselves yielding to God, whatever the circumstances are. Mark 14:32.

**Mark 14:32** *Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." (NKJV)*

This is just prior to his arrest and crucifixion. He was with His disciples before He was arrested. Then in verse 33,

33) *And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. (NKJV)*

This is interesting; we don't usually think of Jesus as being troubled and deeply distressed, we usually think of Him being completely in control of the situation all the way around. Indeed, He was human and He was facing this trial. I suppose you have to say, if Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slain from the foundation of the world, then Jesus had to have known all along that He was eventually going to come to this. But here we see the hour has come and it's necessary for Him to go through with His Father's will. In this case, to become the sacrifice to take away the sins of the world. So He said in verse 34:

34) *Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch."*

*35) He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. (NKJV)*

Jesus knew that He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world and the hour was come. But Jesus was also a human being and He suffered like human beings. He was not looking forward to the kind of treatment that He was going to receive at the hand of his detractors and enemies.

*36) And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." (NKJV)*

It seemed as though Jesus were abandoned but in fact, He wasn't abandoned, the Father was there the whole time. But what we don't see right away is that God is going to require Him to drink the cup—take this cup from Me so I don't have to drink it. It's a bitter cup, it's not something anybody looks forward to. So He's in the garden and He's praying but the hour has come, verse 41.

*41) Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. (NKJV)*

You have to recognize, nobody would look forward to what was ahead and Jesus certainly didn't. We face those situations sometimes where we ask God to intervene, we face a difficult proposition, a troubling circumstance, something that is causing us distress and we go to God seeking help and guidance and sometimes it seems like we've been abandoned. That He has left us to our own devices. In actual fact, I think what He's saying in most cases, you are going to have to drink the cup. There are those occasions when we have to face the bitter circumstances of the situation and we simply have to trust God to help us through it. He doesn't always intervene to make it easy. I have an important statement here in my notes: We must meet God's expectations. Don't expect God to meet our expectations. I think this is where some of the difficulty comes in. When we expect God to meet our expectations, what happens? It leads to depression and discouragement and disappointment and maybe even bitterness because God didn't do what He said He would do. Well, God's going to do what He said He will do, but brethren, we have to recognize that it's God's will that we have to perform, it's what we're here to do. So Thy will be done.

Jesus said in the book of John, I work and My Father works and they've always worked, they work together. Let's consider the work that God is doing for a moment. Let's turn to John 6:44 because this is very familiar territory, but we want to recognize this is a very personal situation that's taking place here. God has called us to do His will, to become a part of His plan and purpose, and we always have to focus there. If we can keep our focus there, we can maintain our balance and avoid the troubling circumstances that come when we just try to go it alone. Verse 43.

**John 6:43** *Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves.*

*44) No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. (NKJV)*

So here Jesus makes a statement. No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him. I'm pointing out there was a time in each of our cases when (I characterize it as though God is starting a new day and He gets out His smart phone, His mobile device with His to-do list) your name has come to the top of the list this day. At some point in time, God focused on each and every one of us and said, alright, time to go to work on this one. Time to draw this one into My plan and into My work. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. So the Father begins to draw us.

Back when God began to draw me into His fellowship and the work of God, we didn't have a smart phone, just had a pad and pencil, and my name was at the top of the list. Things change—things don't change with God, obviously; He doesn't need a smart phone to keep track of us all. Nevertheless, I think it's important that we recognize there was a time when God began to take a special interest in each one of us. We need to keep that in mind as we go through life. We have to give God credit for knowing what is best for us so that we accomplish His purpose. Can you give God credit for that? When the cup is sweet—it's nice to drink the sweet cup, when everything is going well, everything is being provided and there are no storm clouds on the horizon. When the cup is bitter, it's a little more difficult. When the cup is sweet, drink it with grace. When the cup is bitter, drink it in communion with God.

We turn ahead to chapter 14:6 and Jesus makes this statement:

**John 14:6** *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (NKJV)*

Well, which is it? Of course, the way it works is, they both are involved in drawing us and working with us. God draws individuals to Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ points them to the Father, and They work together. We are involved, we are the work of God's hands. We need to recognize that, regularly and continuously. God is about doing a work and we're a part of that work so we find ourselves in a situation where God has in mind what He has to accomplish with us. He's forming us, shaping us to fit His pattern and what He desires, and we just have to yield to that and sometimes it can be a little difficult. Let's turn to Ephesians 2 and again put the focus on the work that God is doing through human beings. Ephesians 2:1.

**Ephesians 2:1** *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2) in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience ... (NKJV)*

We're all called out of this world. We're all involved and engrained and engrossed in it, to one degree or another, and it's characterized as a course of this world, and it goes according to the prince of the power of the air—the devil himself. The end result is you have a spirit that works in a characterized way, called the sons of disobedience, and that is the result of going Satan's way. We've come out of that. We've been engrossed and entangled in that and God calls us out of that.

*3) among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (NKJV)*

We're sinners—all human beings; all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and He describes it here in pretty graphic terms. Children of wrath, sons of disobedience, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind—just a bunch of sinners. Notice verse 4.

*4) But God [this is the Father], who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,  
5) even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ... (NKJV)*

That's an interesting statement. God intervenes in the midst of a bunch of sinners and draws individuals out, and Paul says again in verse 5, even when we were dead in trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ. There are actually those in high places who think God is incapable of working with people who are sinners, that because of sin, sin separates you from God so God can't possibly be involved. That's not what Paul said to the Ephesians. He said you came out of a world that's sinful, it's characterized by sin, by wrath, by lust, by disobedience. Verse 4 again.

*4) But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,  
5) even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ... (NKJV)*

Continuing then.

*6) and raised us up together [God did this], and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,  
7) that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (NKJV)*

Of course that kindness is manifested by the fact that God was willing to provide a sacrifice and Jesus Christ was willing to be that sacrifice. That of course is the basis whereby He shows His kindness to us. Again, in verse 8,

8) *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God ... (NKJV)*

God has laid it out, this plan of salvation that we speak of, anticipating God's Kingdom, being prepared for that Kingdom. He has laid it out in a way where it's only possible through God's intervention. There is no way on earth that we can put together the right combination of good behavior and good intentions and make it there on our own. It's something that has to be given to us. It is a gift of God, this business of grace. That's encouraging obviously inasmuch as we can become downright discouraged trying to do it all on our own. You can't receive the grace of God, verse 9.

9) *not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

10) *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ... (NKJV)*

We are His workmanship. God is a workman, God has a project that He's engaged in, and you and I are part of it. Each one of us. He's forming and shaping us to meet His criteria. You understand, the effect of grace is that He makes us innocent, He justifies us, we are forgiven, and that comes as a gift. It's not going to be granted to somebody who is totally, aggressively contrary to God. It will be granted to those who have been drawn, who have responded and are beginning to pursue God's way, and then it's granted to us. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,

10 continued) *... which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (NKJV)*

Grace is a gift—the effects of grace, that is. Being justified, being forgiven, being cleaned up, if you will, made innocent in that sense, that's one thing. Character, however, going on to perfection, requires a long series of moral choices. So when God extends grace, it's the beginning. Now we have to go to work and live according to God's way of life and that's important. I think sometimes maybe we forget that. It's just a long series of moral choices. We can't take a break from doing God's will: I'm tired, I think I'll take a break. Well, take a nap but don't take a break from doing God's will. You'll just find yourself coming up very, very short.

Let's take another look at the business of grace and take another look at 2 Corinthians, chapter 12. This business of grace is important. Have you ever been in a situation (Paul describes a situation where he faced a particular difficulty and he asked God to intervene for him and God told him, My grace is sufficient to you) where you thought you had to settle for grace and God failed to give you what you desired, what you wanted, and somehow you just had to settle for grace? Paul was in a situation; let's notice in 2 Corinthians 12, he describes his vision of paradise. We oftentimes refer to it as the third heaven, but it doesn't actually say the third heaven, it says paradise. You might describe it as a third heaven in the sense that it's the atmosphere where the birds fly—that would be the first one, the second one has the celestial bodies, and the third one is way out there beyond the stars. That gives us an incomplete picture because our

relationship and closeness to God is not a matter of geography, it's a matter of relationship. At any rate, he has this vision of paradise.

**2 Corinthians 12:7** *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me ...* (NKJV)

Paul is of a particular character and coming from his old position as a Pharisee, he wasn't afraid of boasting of what he'd accomplished; that was the nature of the man. To avoid being exalted above measure, God gave him this thorn in the flesh,

*7 continued) ... a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.* (NKJV)

*Lest I be exalted above measure.* I can't comprehend exactly what it would be like to have to deal with a messenger from Satan, buffeting you pretty regularly. I'm just glad God hasn't found it necessary to send such a thorn in my flesh. Here is Paul dealing with this. Of course, as trouble is sent to him, you and I can imagine what a messenger from Satan might do to disrupt one's thinking and confidence and all.

*8) Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.* (NKJV)

Paul's will was, please, dear God, take away this thorn, this is really distressing.

*9) And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* (NKJV)

God is taking away every option for boasting, every option for taking credit for accomplishing what God wants accomplished. He'll do the same for you and me. We may have certain things in mind that we would like to achieve. Let's make sure those things are in harmony with God and what He desires.

*10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* (NKJV)

There's a fine principle for you. That's not a particularly comfortable position to be in. Most of us don't like the notion of being weak, for whatever form of weakness it might be. Weak because of physical ailments of one sort or another. Weak financially because we don't have the resources we'd like in order to live the kind of life we would like. Just weak in whatever way. It's not a comfortable place to be. Paul said, okay, but this is where God has placed me. The statement is made in verse 9 again.

*9) ... "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."* (NKJV)



Sorry, Paul, you're just going to have to cope with the thorn in the flesh because this way there's no mistake—you will give Me credit in every situation. Whatever is accomplished, you will look to Me. And Paul responds, if that's the case, then I'll do my best to cope with it.

Here's the point I want to make here. When you have received the grace of God, which you have, you have already received the best gift that God has to offer. If you're ever in a position where you have to settle for God's grace, understand there's no greater situation to be in. God has no greater gift than that of His grace, of including you in His plan and purpose. So occasionally we have to deal with our weaknesses, because in so doing, we give God credit. Anything you receive beyond the grace of God is icing on the cake. We don't always get exactly what we want. Let's face it, if what we wanted accomplished the purpose, we wouldn't need God. A lot of people out there, roaming around, think they don't need God—whatever happens, I'm perfectly capable of achieving great things on my own. Maybe not. What is God's will? God is forming us, shaping us—we are actually His workmanship.

Let's turn to Philippians now, another familiar place where we see God at work and we need to bear this in mind. We need to be reminded from time to time that we are God's workmanship. God has called us to do His will and fulfill His purpose.

**Philippians 1:3** *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,  
4) always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy ... (NKJV)*

To think back on one's experience in the ministry and to talk to any minister who's been around for a while and been involved in dealing with new people, it's always a great joy to experience someone who is just really excited about the prospect of doing the will of God. It seems there are so few and so far between who really present themselves as instruments in God's hands. Paul is expressing that, this great joy, to know that here in Philippi there is this congregation of people seeking the will of God. He rejoices in that, verse 5,

*5) for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,  
6) being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (NKJV)*

When one looks back in time, in my case I've been in the ministry for fifty years and was baptized fifty-five years or whatever it is (a long time ago), if I go back to the beginning when I began to take God seriously and to examine the scriptures, and try to conform to them, I had a certain idea about how I thought things would work out. Who knows, I don't even recall the daydreams I might have had about how I thought God was going to work things out in my life. But when I look back on it, I can't think of a single thing that worked out the way I thought it would. I mean nothing, absolutely nothing. So what is that about? What that is about is we aren't here to do our own will, to seek our own

purpose, but to submit to God and to God's will and God's purpose. Thy will be done. So we have to submit ourselves to God in that way. Recognizing again, verse 7.

*7) just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. (NKJV)*

The grace of God. We've been called to do the will of God. Now let's go back to Hebrews 2 and get another glimpse of the work that God is doing. He has a plan in mind and when you examine the state of the world it's hard to find evidence that God is doing anything of consequence. So be it, it doesn't make any difference what you see, it's what God is doing and what He will eventually achieve that's important, so we need to look to Him and not to the circumstances around us, either in the world or in our own personal lives, for that matter. Hebrews 2:10.

**Hebrews 2:10** *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, [it's the Father that brings sons or children to glory] to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (NKJV)*

Who's the captain of our salvation? That would be Jesus Christ. Notice, it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Really? Does it take suffering to bring us to perfection? It isn't that Jesus was going to sin, but He went through the same things that you and I have to go through in order to come to the place where God wants us. Jesus had to run the whole race. When the time came, He had to drink the bitter cup and perform the entire will of God.

*11) For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,  
12) saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."  
13) And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."  
14) Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil ... (NKJV)*

We might puzzle at what and how God carries out His will, but it's not ours to question. Verse 15, the purpose being to:

*15) ... release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (NKJV)*

For fear of death. People struggling and scrapping to avoid death, one way or another, and of course nobody wants to die prematurely.

16) *For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.* (NKJV)

Seed (singular) being Jesus Christ.

17) *Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

18) *For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.* (NKJV)

You can't get through this life without facing temptation, without facing the difficulties and the struggles of life, and Jesus Christ, who is our High Priest, has set the pace, gone before us, prepared the way, and it is a certainty that we, too, can follow in His footsteps.

So Jesus spent his life doing the Father's will, doing the Father's work, so when the bitter cup of crucifixion came, it was required that He carry that forward. He literally put His life in His Father's hands. Indeed that's what happened, God allowed Him to die, and of course three days later He resurrected Him. It was through God's power that He was resurrected. So the key to handling the bitter cup—because you are going to face the bitter cup once in a while, as well—is to do what Jesus did. We must eventually trust God with our very lives. Do we trust God with our very lives? Do we understand the importance of putting God first in everything? Well, I saved a little bit for myself—no, you can't save anything for yourself. We must commit ourselves entirely to the will of God. Let's turn to Luke 14. Anybody who's been through baptismal counseling, the minister probably took you here and reminded you of a couple of things. What we are about to do, and I think back on baptism counseling (how old was I, twenty-two years old) and I had been studying seriously for a couple of years, was now a student at Ambassador College, so the counselors presented these things to me and, oh yes, I understand, I'm going to be baptized. To the degree that I was able to understand, I did, but looking back on it, oh dear, there are some things here that I didn't really realize I was going to have to put up with, and yet here we are.

**Luke 14:25** *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,*

26) *If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.* (NKJV)

Check the commentaries and they will tell you about this word "hate". They'll say it means to love less by comparison. I often thought to myself, if it means love less by comparison, why didn't they just translate it that way—but they didn't. This is very personal. How many people have used their association, their obligation to parents or to spouse or to children or to siblings, to postpone going the way of God? God wants

us to respond, and He wants us to understand that nothing can come between us and our relationship to Him. Unfortunately, there are situations where they think, God would never ask me to—you name it. Don't be too sure. There was a day when personally I had to choose between going God's way or, on the other hand, maintaining the relationship of my first marriage. I had to actually choose. Who are you going to choose? What are you going to do? It came down to just that. If I chose to believe and to pursue God's way at that point in the situation, the marriage was over. What was I going to do? Surely God wouldn't put me in a position where I had to make that choice. Well, He did. Fortunately He doesn't do that with everybody. I say fortunately, because I don't know that I am in a position to justify or qualify what's fortunate or not—it's God's will we're trying to perceive. Look at this—father, mother, wife, children—many people have come out of a situation where they had to abandon the old traditions and practices of the family in order to achieve God's will, in order to go God's way. It wasn't always easy. Families get upset because somebody decides to go God's way. I don't know what it is about the truth, when somebody embraces the truth, pursues it with energy, what happens? Man draws fire, hostility. It's hard to understand.

*27) And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)*

I'm quite certain I didn't know what that meant when I went into baptismal waters. What does it mean to be crucified with Christ? It doesn't mean that you're going to be nailed to a stake like He was but you're going to have to be willing to abandon your life to God's will and in a sense be crucified—give it all up.

*28) For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— (NKJV)*

We've committed ourselves and now there is no turning back. Here in the same chapter, book of Luke, chapter 9, another troubling situation—verse 62. I've often thought about this over the years, as I face troubles and difficulties, and found myself weak and somewhat unprepared for what I was having to deal with. So here are individuals making excuses for why they can't go God's way. Let's go back to verse 57 and read through to the end of the chapter.

**Luke 9:57** *Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." (NKJV)*

Oh yes, okay—good. That's a good attitude. *I will follow You wherever You go.* So what did Jesus say to him?

*58) And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (NKJV)*

Are you sure you know what you're talking about when you say you will follow Me wherever I go? Think about that. What is Jesus trying to do, discourage them? He wants you to certainly think about your commitment.

*59) Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." (NKJV)*

I'm assuming that doesn't mean his father is dead and they're waiting to go to the funeral. I think it means, I have obligations to the older generation and just as soon as I get those obligations taken care of, then I'll come. Just give me a little time. When I was first encountering the proposition of having to keep the Sabbath, first of all it was not playing baseball on the Sabbath, and it seemed like a hard decision to make at the time, but you'd better do it now. Get it done. Later I faced the proposition that when I was still studying, I was down at Cal Poly, trying to catch up and graduate on time, and yet I was just overwhelmed by the intensity of the desire to pursue God's way, so it comes to me, what are you going to do? Well, I'll just wait until I graduate, it won't be long and then I'll begin to obey You. Okay, which is it? No, you'd better do it now. Okay, let's do it now. Think about that—we've been called; don't just put it off, let's get busy and do what God wants us to do.

*60) Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."*

*61) And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." (NKJV)*

I don't know what that meant. Maybe it meant that once I get out of sight, I'll go do something else.

*62) But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (NKJV)*

It doesn't say turn back, it says look back. If you put your hand to the plow, what's more important? Pleasing somebody or finishing some project or other, or seeking the will of God? It's something we have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. No way around it. A couple weeks ago we had a sermon on the book of Ruth and some of the lessons contained in it. Let's go back to chapter 1 of Ruth and focus a little bit more on the circumstances that poor Naomi faced. This is important, where she finds herself. Maybe to a greater or lesser degree I'm sure we'll all find ourselves in situations similar to this. Remember the story, verse 1.

**Ruth 1:1** *Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.*

*2) The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. (NKJV)*

So there's a famine, they are refugees. There isn't enough to eat, they have to leave home because there isn't enough to eat. Have you ever been a situation like that? Think of the people in Paradise, California—27,000 people and their city is burned to the ground. There's a refugee problem in California, folks. Have you ever been a refugee for one reason or another, had to flee because of circumstances? We recognize they are in a tough situation. So he took his wives, they got there, verse 3, and Naomi's husband dies. Not only are we starving at home, we are refugees, we flee, and now Naomi's husband dies—where's God when you need Him? So she was left, she and her two sons. Long and short of it was, his sons took wives of Moab, Orpah and Ruth, and they dwelt there for ten years and then the sons died—Mahlon and Chilion. So the woman survived her two sons, that is she outlived her two sons and her husband. It's a difficult thing to lose a child. It's a difficult thing to lose your spouse. Therefore, Naomi is a refugee, loses her husband, loses both sons, now what? Finally they turn and go back home after ten years or more. It's interesting the response she gets; notice verse 19. Here's poor Naomi, in really difficult circumstances, but evidently conditions have improved back home so she goes back there.

*19) Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" (NKJV)*

Naomi means "pleasant". Notice Naomi's response.

*20) But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. (NKJV)*

Can you blame her? She's in a situation where at every turn she has been dealt a heavy blow.

*21) I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" (NKJV)*

The story turns out alright and the focus shifts to Ruth, who becomes one of the ancestors of Jesus Himself. But this is a difficult proposition that Naomi is in and we may face similar circumstances. God may allow us to drink the bitter cup. It isn't because He hates us or delights in seeing us suffer, sometimes the consequences are what they are. We don't know the consequences or the circumstances around the death of Naomi's husband or her sons, but they died. It happens from time to time. Where is God when I need Him? We all have these experiences. It turns out the experiences that are common in the world are common to ourselves.

Let's turn to Matthew 15. My daughter died of a brain tumor after about a ten-year battle with the project and Linda and I came back to Washington State after three years in Indianapolis, and that summer we came back, Debbie went through a serious

episode with this seizure and it became apparent that she was dying—it was obvious. So what do you do? This is someone dear to you and so you go to work and say, alright, I've got to put forth a little extra effort here with God and see what happens. Chapter 15, at the time this was an important understanding that I dealt with. We're told in Chapter 15, verse 21 of Matthew,

**Matthew 15:21** *Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon.*

22) *And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."* (NKJV)

This is a Gentile woman—nameless, faceless, we don't know who she is, anything about her, somehow or another she learned that Jesus is the Lord, the Son of David, and that He has the power to intervene on behalf of her daughter. Notice verse 23.

23) *But He answered her not a word. [He ignored her, brethren, because notice] And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."* (NKJV)

Jesus didn't talk to her so she goes and badgers the disciples, and the disciples say, do something with this woman, she's badgering us. Verse 24, notice Jesus said:

24) *But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* (NKJV)

He tells this to the disciples. So she came, she's not giving up.

25) *Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"*

26) *But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."* (NKJV)

Really? Jesus' response to this woman worshipping Him, He says to her—sorry, you're a Gentile dog and it's not right to give the children's bread to you. Well now, there's a side of Jesus you don't see mentioned much. But now notice.

27) *And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."*

28) *Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.* (NKJV)

In my distress, over my condition of my own daughter, I went to God with this very same situation. Went to Jesus Christ, to God the Father—okay, look, we have a desperate situation here, would you mind rolling a couple of crumbs off the table here for us? He answered not a word. I'm not the only one who's had to deal with something like this. Frankly, it's quite common, but what are you going to do then? Are you going to shake

your fist at God? Are you going to lose faith in the fact that God is Creator, that's it's His purpose, that it's His will we are pursuing in the first place? It is a tragedy. One of the more heavy responsibilities that I had in my ministry was to officiate at the funeral, in three separate situations, of infants—little ones. The first one, my very first pastorate, and it was a cold, winter's day, and the child was only a few months old and died—sad situation. What do you say to a mother who just lost an infant child? Later, in California, a little girl—a church member's and dear friends—was born and died after about eighteen days. I thought, this is going to be a difficult funeral so I worked really hard to prepare myself for it, what I might say, to be of some kind of comfort. What are we going to say? What did I say? I don't remember. I'm at a loss to know what one says to a woman who's lost her child at eighteen days of age. I thought I was prepared, so I was, until at the grave site they brought out this little shoe-box-sized casket and it just disarmed me. I was just speechless for a time.

Where is God when these things happen? Sometimes the cup is bitter. What will we do, how will we respond? Remember what He said—don't put anybody or anything between Me and you—not your mother, father, brother, sister, child—no one, nobody. These things happen. God will sort these things. The last one, my most recent pastorate, the child was born and died the same day. Again, what am I going to say that will somehow be encouraging? One thing I didn't say was, it's the Lord's will and it will all work out fine. That's the last thing a parent wants to hear when they've just lost a child, just barely born. What did I say? I said, I don't know the answer, is what I said. God will sort it out for sure. Is it God's will for these things to happen? I guess you could say it's God's will to the extent that He could have prevented it. So we have to be careful how we judge God. These are terrible circumstances, they put a terrible burden on us. We face these kinds of situations and we have mature to the point where we learn to trust God, whatever the conditions, whatever the circumstances. Look around the world. You look at the conditions that exist, the nation, people losing their children to war and famine and displacement and disease of one sort or another. God knows. Jesus Christ knows. We who have been called of God to do the will of God; we too, in places, have experienced these kinds of things, and I can only say, we're going to have compassion for those who have also experienced the same thing.

What do we say? We've been called to do the will of God regardless of the circumstances. We have to learn to trust God and to put Him first and let Him sort it out for us. Let's turn to Romans 8. A lot could be said, there are a lot of examples in the scripture of people who faced disappointments and difficulties, and had to face the reality of their new situation and trust God to lead them through it. We look back on Ruth and Naomi and think, well, it's so long ago, it will all work out. Yeah, that's easy for us to look back and say, it will all work out, they're going to be resurrected, etc. etc. Okay, when we're faced with the same proposition, and God asks us to drink the bitter cup, to trust that we're going to do God's will, then we have to demonstrate that we're really willing to do God's will. I think we will all face a situation, a life-and-death situation, where we have no options. We learn to look to God to sort things out. Chapter 8, verse 18, of the book of Romans.



**Romans 8:18** *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (NKJV)*

There's one of the keys to dealing with the setbacks and the challenges, the disappointments of this life. It's to focus on the glory which shall be revealed in us. Those that have gone before us, they looked to the joy that was ahead.

*19) For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (NKJV)*

Yes, it will all be sorted out, and yes, there are serious difficulties and disappointments, and trials and tests in this life—all of it—so we do the will of God. I can't explain it all, don't have all the answers, but I do know we have to continue to look to God and recognize it's His will and not our own.

*20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; (NKJV)*

I've used the analogy in the past, God is not some hip-pocket God, whom we can bring out every now and then to ask Him to do our will, and then, back in you go and just stay over there, out of my way for a time until I need You again—no, that's not the way it works. God is working with us. Yes, it's futile, this life, often by itself, but He has subjected us in this world in hope,

*21) because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

*22) For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (NKJV)*

It does. Everywhere you look, there are difficulties in the world. In the meantime, Thy will be done.

*23) Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves ... (NKJV)*

Whatever the nature of our trial or our difficulty in this world, yes, we groan in ourselves,

*23 continued) ... eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (NKJV)*

We'll leave this flesh behind one day, all in God's due time.

*24) For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? (NKJV)*

There again, we have to, in this business of hoping for something we haven't yet received, remember that it's been promised to us but we don't yet have it, so we then have to place our trust in God. We have to learn that God is trustworthy.

*25) But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (NKJV)*

Does that describe us? That's the end, that's what God wants us to do, that's why He continues to work with us.

*26) Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. (NKJV)*

In weakness God's strength is made great. So expect to be weak from time to time.

*26 continued) For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.  
27) Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (NKJV)*

There's the key: It's the will of God.

*28) And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (NKJV)*

It's His purpose we are pursuing, not our own.

*29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.  
30) Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.  
31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?  
32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?  
33) Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.  
34) Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. (NKJV)*

So brethren, what do we do? All things are possible, He said. Take this cup from me if it be Your will. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.