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Scripture: Matthew 26:36-42

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?..... He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

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

Man's original sin is the sin of self-centeredness. Whatever the overt act was by which Adam and Eve fell, the basic sin was in setting their will, their wisdom, their opinion or right and wrong, against the will, the wisdom, and the opinion of Deity. And every son and daughter of Adam and Eve from then until now has been obsessed with the same original sin -- the sin of self-centeredness-- the sin of wanting to have his own way whatever the cost in pain and suffering to himself and to others.

The world and the universe of which it is a part was made to function as a unity under one will -- the will of God. No atom or cell can be completely independent of every other atom and every other cell. No man can be completely independent, or have his own way at all times without opposition. The law of the universe is basically one law. That law operates the same way in the vast reaches of outer space as it does on earth. The laws governing the universe are basically one because they were given by one Lawgiver, and because this Lawgiver is still active in his universe, is still the power by which it is ordered, sustained, controlled, and directed.

Therefore, when man attempts to become a law unto himself in an attempt to substitute his will, and his wishes for the will of God, he sooner or later finds himself in serious trouble, just as Adam and Eve found themselves in trouble when they presumed to set their own desires above the commands of their Creator. The effects today are the same as they were in the days of Adam and Eve. First, when man insists on his own will, and demands his own way, he is separated from God, just as Adam and Eve were separated from God's presence and banished from Eden. Second, when a man insists on his own will and way, he is divided, uneasy, restless, dissatisfied within himself. His own personality is split and divided. He is at war with himself.

Third, when a man insists on his own will and way, he finds sooner or later that he is working against the laws of Nature. Everything goes wrong. Thorns and briars grow instead of pleasant grains and fruits, when man works against God. And fourth, when a man insists on his own will and way, he separates himself from his fellow-man, just as Adam and Eve felt ashamed and strange in each other's presence after they had disobeyed God's will, and just as the first murder came about through the separation of Cain and Abel.

It is supremely important, then, that men should seek to do God's will rather than their own. A prayer for this happy condition is included in the model prayer given to us by our Lord himself, who taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven." You and I have prayed that prayer many

times, yet God's will is still not being done on earth, and his kingdom has not come. The complete fulfillment of that prayer will require a basic change in man's nature - which will mean a complete redemption from the fall, and from the curse of the original sin, which is self-centeredness. Unless the old man dies, and is born again of the Spirit of God -- inless he has the life, the mind, and the will of Jesus Christ within him, he can never be reunited with God. He can never be at unity and at peace with himself, or with his fellow man, or with the forces of Nature in the world about him.

Jesus came that man might be redeemed from the curse he brought upon himself by his rebellion and self-will. Jesus, of all men who ever lived, did God's will on earth perfectly. Though he claimed and manifested the powers and prerogatives of Deity, he was perfectly devoted to doing the Father's will. He was subject to the Father in all things. Paul in his letter to the Hebrews quoted a verse from the 40th Psalm and applied it to Jesus: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O Lord." Jesus himself said, "I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which sent me;" and again, "I come down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."

When we think of Jesus praying the prayer, "Thy will be done," it is customary to think of him in the Garden of Gethsemane, wrestling in prayer and contemplating the agony of the cross. But if we think of him as saying "Thy will be done" as a beaten, frustrated, weak, resigned person would say it, we are completely wrong. Sometimes we sing the hymn, "Have thine own way, Lord, Have thine own way! Thou art the Potter; I am the clay." Sometimes we think of Christ in Gethsemane as an inert lump of senseless, immobile matter, waiting for the ruthless blows of a potter to shape it. But Jesus was not senseless, inert, frustrated, or beaten. He was submitting himself to God's will, but that submission was active, not passive. He did not merely suffer affliction and death; he went out to meet them half way. He met them, conquered them, and rose above them to declare, "I have overcome the world."

Read again the story of Jesus' betrayal, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Read it carefully, and you will discover that Jesus was not a passive sufferer. True he offered no resistance; he opened not his mouth. But in all the horrible business of the trial and execution, he was the personality which stood head and shoulders above all other personalities. In spite of his bonds and his shame, he was the central figure, the stage manager, the director, and producer of the drama that unfolded during those tragic days. In it all he was not a cringing puppy dog of a man, not an inert lump of clay waiting for the blows of fate, but the commanding figure

The point to all this is that when Jesus in Gethsemane prayed, "Not my will but thine be done," it was more than a prayer of helpless, hopeless, supine resignation. Certainly it included the thought, "Thy will be done TO me." But it included vastly more. Jesus was exercising his agency; and it was his desire that he should always actively DO God's will, as well as that God's will should be done TO him. Or in other words, "Thy will be done BY me, IN me, and THROUGH me," as well as "Thy will be done TO me."

Too many Christians use "Thy will be done" as an excuse for utter, helpless, hopeless resignation. They think it is good to come before God as a lump of clay, waiting to be shaped by God's hand. But every man's character is shaped by his own decisions, as well as by the hand of God. The lump of clay in which the human spirit dwells is governed, guided, ruled, and directed by the human spirit, which has a mind and will of its own. That spirit can seek God's will and do it, or know God's will and rebel against it; and it is those decisions which shape the personality and the character which will endure through all eternity.

There is a time and place for resignation -- for a quiet seeking after God's will with self-will completely blotted out. There comes a time in the life of every man when he has done all he can do, when he has used his own best judgment and failed -- when he must rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. There comes a time in the life of every man when he must bow his head resignedly before afflictions which he cannot prevent any more than he can understand. But if we are determined that God's shall be done BY us, IN us, and THROUGH us, as well as TO us, we can take even the tragedies of life, and as active, dynamic instruments in God's hands, use even tragedy as a means of grace -- as steps by which we climb to the kingdom in which God's will is perfectly done by men at peace with their God, with their neighbors, with Nature, and with themselves.