

“WHAT IS GOD’S WILL?”

Matthew 18:12-14

Critical Searching Inquiries Series

November 25, 2012

Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

This morning we are concluding the sermon series, “Critical Searching Inquiries.” My hope is that exploring some Biblical ways of looking at these various questions has helped you discover some ways of thinking them through. Next week, of course, we begin Advent.

A common question today when so many people are being affected by illness and tragedy is “why?” Why do things like this happen to such good people? Why is life so uncertain? Why is there so much heartache and pain? Where is God when we suffer?

In searching for answers, and in the pain we often feel, we sometimes seek to bring meaning to these things by proclaiming that they must be God’s will. They must be part of God’s infinite plan. We say that God must have some deeper purpose for allowing this to happen.

And yet whenever I hear people say, “This must be God’s will,” I cringe. I cringe because I don’t know a God like that. I see and know a God, as Jesus states, who “*is not willing that one of these little ones should perish*,” but that all will come to know him. A God, who Jesus reveals, who came “*that they may have life, and have it to the full*.” (John 10:10)

Yet the prevailing attitude among so many is that all deaths, and accidents, and sickness are somehow God’s will and plan. Some insurance policies on property will cover everything except what they call “an act of God.” And by that they mean some calamitous event like a flood, an earthquake, or a tornado. The idea that God is pouring out his destruction on us.

And yet to say that sorrow, a tragic death, an incurable disease, an air disaster, a terrorist bombing, or a war are acts of God is in essence blasphemy. For what kind of a God would that be? Who would ever want to follow or pray to a God like that?

To me, God is just the opposite. It is his will, stated in Matthew 18:14, and 1 Timothy 2:4, that none of us should perish, but that all should come to repentance and faith. It is God’s will stated in Jeremiah 29:11, “*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*”

To me God is grieved when he sees a young person paralyzed for life. He is grieved when wild fires burn homes, or tornados ravage towns, and people are made homeless. He is grieved when a drunk driver kills another person. And he is grieved when lives, marriages, and families are destroyed through mixed up priorities and overindulgence in work or addictions.

Dr. Alvin Rogness, president of Luther Seminary when I was a student (and now deceased) had a son who was struck and killed by a truck at the age of 24. In his book, “*Appointment With Death*,” Dr. Rogness wrote these words:

"I found comfort in anger. I was not angry with the driver of the vehicle who certainly willed no harm, nor was I angry at God. How could I have God responsible for street accidents, or for the slow march of cancer, or for the bomb at Hiroshima? I could be angry at this 'sorry scheme of things entire,' where things go awry for both God and man.

"Some people," he continues, "may be comforted in the thought that God, as a great engineer and architect, arranges everything that happens. I found greater comfort in the thought that God did not want this young life so soon transferred to another part of his enterprises, but that he, too, sorrowed with us and would have wished him to serve now in this world and not yet in some other."

God had a master plan for this world. He created the heavens and earth, and he created man and woman to enjoy all this. His plan was that woman and man live in peace and harmony with everyone. Not one bit of envy, jealousy, evil or hatred was to exist. God loved the world and it was his plan and desire that everyone would love each other.

There would be no wars if this plan were followed. There would be no broken homes and marriages. There would be no adultery, no poverty, no revenge, no prejudice. It was God's plan that humans should be free from disease, unhappiness, and even from death.

God created the heavens and earth and saw that it was good. He made the sun, the moon, and stars and it was good. Then he created the waters, the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and God saw that it was good. Next it was the animals, wild and domestic. And then the crown of his creation, man and woman, he made in his own image. And it was very good.

This was God's will and plan. It was his will that all creation live in harmony; that all love and serve him forever. And yet that plan was spoiled. Man and woman chose to wreck this plan of God by choosing to follow the evil one. They chose to follow their own will rather than God.

Romans 5:12 says that *"just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin...in this way death came to all people, because all have sinned."* These are not my words, but God's word through Paul. In other words, had man and woman not gone against God's will and plan, the creation would still be sinless and good.

Now all we can do is dream about a warless world and a crime, and trouble free, age. We can only hope that our sorrows will not be too severe, our troubles not too many, our bodies not too infested with disease. All of these are now part of life which we cannot escape. They are not respecters of persons. The Bible says the rain falls on the just and unjust alike.

That, my friend, is why I hitch my wagon to Jesus Christ. God looked at this mess which we had made of his world and his love overflowed. Literally it exploded. And Jesus, God's own son, came to rescue us from this mess. He came to rescue us from sin, from fears, from worry and to help us to live. He wants to help us live not under the messy circumstances of life, but on top of them.

In Christ the restoration process toward God's original plan is underway in the lives of those who believe in him. We have his love, his forgiveness, his peace and his newness to saturate our lives. And that gives us hope. I wouldn't miss it for anything and I hope you won't either.

This is why it is so important to learn something about God's plan and to learn to follow his will. If we do, we will discover that it is not a destructive, merciless type of will. He isn't out to beat us down, sneak germs into our bodies, or kill us through accidents. God loves you more than you can imagine and he has a plan for your life.

His will for you is *"for good and not for disaster, to give you a future with hope."* He wills that you be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him. It is his will that you not perish, but that you repent of your sins and come to know him as your personal Savior and Lord.

Pastor Bill Vaswig, in his book, *"At Your Word, Lord,"* reminds us that never in his ministry did Jesus ever refuse to help or heal a person by saying that this person's sickness or problem was God's will. Rather, he offered each one the gift of forgiveness, healing, love and hope. He showed them that God's will is always on the side of life and wholeness.

Even when Jesus came to the home of Mary & Martha shortly after the death of their brother, Lazarus, Jesus did not tell them that his death was God's will or that God needed him in heaven at this time. Rather, Jesus wept bitterly.

And then he foiled the enemy of death by raising Lazarus from the grave. Jesus proclaimed that he is the resurrection and the life, and that whoever lives and believes in him will live forever. Even in death God's will for us is life—life everlasting in heaven.

Having this assurance is so important to our lives of faith because, knowing that God is not the one who is afflicting us, gives us courage to completely trust in him. And knowing God's love and will for us means that we can diligently pray to him for healing and health. It means we can claim his power and victory over all that is bad and evil, and over all the sins that continue to dominate what we do. It means we can completely trust in his love that will never fail us.

So God's basic will for your life is easy to define. It is summed up in these verses that proclaim it is God's will that none of us should perish, but that we should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. It is summed up in the words of Jesus in John 10:10, *"I have come that (you) might have life, and have it to the full."* In a nutshell, that means that God's will is that you come to know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.

Sometimes people say, "I can't believe in a God who causes children to die in car accidents, or people to get cancer, or who causes devastating tornados or earthquakes." And my response is, "I can't either."

For the God I know and love through faith is a God who does not will or cause sickness, pain or death. But rather is a loving and compassionate Savior who wants to fill you with healing, life and hope. Won't you commit your life to him this day?