

Intro:

I first preached this message on 4.27.03. I have adapted it a little for our series on prayer.

In our passage, some believing Gentiles (Greeks) came to inquire of Jesus.

John did not give a direct reply of our Lord to them, but their visit prompts a discourse in which Jesus discusses several things that are on His mind.

One thing that He makes much of is this, the Law of Spiritual Progress.

Spiritual Progress *only* occurs through sacrifice / death. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

This train of thought brings our Lord into a contemplation of God’s will and plan for Himself, which must shortly come to pass.

We will see that the contemplation of this makes Jesus anxious. God’s will is often like that. Men say that they know something is God’s will because they have a “peace about it.” I wonder if that is not a sign of self-will rather than God’s will.

I read an amusing story about God’s will — it seems to illustrate the dilemma that we are faced when confronted with the will of God for our life:

A man named Jack was walking along a steep cliff one day when he accidentally got too close to the edge and fell. On the way down he grabbed a branch, which temporarily stopped his fall. He looked down and to his horror saw that the canyon fell straight down for more than a thousand feet. He couldn’t hang onto the branch forever, and there was no way for him to climb up the steep wall of the cliff. So Jack began yelling for help, hoping that someone passing by would hear him and lower a rope or something.

“HELP! HELP! Is anyone up there? HELP!” He yelled for a long time, but no one heard him. He was about to give up when he heard a voice.

- “Jack, Jack. Can you hear me?”
- “Yes, yes! I can hear you. I’m down here!”
- “I can see you, Jack. Are you all right?”
- “Yes, but who are you, and where are you?”
- “I am the Lord, Jack. I’m everywhere.”
- “The Lord? You mean, GOD?”
- “That’s Me.”
- “God, please help me! I promise if You’ll get me down from here,

I'll stop sinning. I'll be a really good person. I'll serve You for the rest of my life."

- "Easy on the promises, Jack. Let's just get you down from there; then we can talk. Now, here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully."
- "I'll do anything, Lord. Just tell me what to do."
- "Okay. Let go of the branch."
- "What?"
- "I said, let go of the branch. Just trust Me. Let go."

There was a long silence. Finally Jack yelled, "HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE?"

Sometimes, when we see clearly the will of God, we shrink back, hoping for another plan. Sometimes we try to create our own plan, one that suits us better.

In our passage, our Lord contemplates one prayer, only to reject it in favour of another prayer, a prayer the Father delighted to answer.

Read John 12.27-28

Proposition: Obeying the will of God puts God's servant in a dilemma: to glorify self or glorify God — that is the question.

I. Dilemma Posed (27)

A. By the fact that obedience runs counter to self-interest

1. The cost of obedience: an anguished soul

a. Depth of anguish

1) Deeply internal – in the spirit

a) The soul – the 'psyche'

b) Contrast 'the spirit' in 11.33

2) Personal turmoil

"The verb *troubled* or *agitated* (on which see also 5:7; 11:33; 13:21; 14:27; especially 14:1), here perfect passive indicative, indicates that this mighty disturbance in the soul of Christ had been going on for some time and has now become very intense."¹

a) Consider the threats in which He was not troubled

¹ Hendricksen, p. 198

- i) Precipice of Nazareth
- ii) When they took up stones to crush him to death
- iii) In the face of the raging storm on the sea of Galilee
- b) Compare 14.1: “But the price of their peace is His trouble of spirit.”²
- b. Cause of anguish

“If this were a mere man, we would not be surprised.”³

- 1) Men shrink from death, physical pain or personal loss.
- 2) Jesus is in turmoil from something else: not mere death, but the spiritual trauma of the sinless becoming the sin-bearer
 - a) Not mere death: martyrs have faced death without flinching
 - b) Imputed sin: the weight of God’s wrath on all sin placed on him
 - c) Breach of eternity: God cannot look on sin; what would it be for the Father to turn away from the Son?
 - d) Infinite cost

“None of us understands fully what it cost God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son to forgive our sins.”⁴

- 2. The alternative suggested by self-interest: escape [REJECTED BY CHRIST]
 - a. The punctuation should have the question mark after “hour” (Punctuation is not inspired.)
 - b. Clarification: “Should I say, ‘Father save me from this hour?’”

This is the prayer not prayed. But when we are confronted with God’s known ... and difficult ... will, what do we pray?

² Morris, p. 594, footnote 73

³ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 338

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 337

- “Oh Lord, send some one else” — Moses

The will of God often is contrary to our self-will:

- What about that neighbour to whom you should witness?
- What about that practice you should give up for the glory of God?
- What about that ambition you must put on the shelf in order to serve God?

How often people have come to me and announced they are about to do something that is clearly out of the will of God, yet they have said, “I’ve prayed about it. I have a peace about it.”

- God’s will isn’t peaceful.
- It isn’t even God’s will for you to pray some prayers.

But the Lord’s dilemma also involves...

B. By the knowledge that God’s cause is pre-eminent

1. “But” makes a strong contrast with the alternative of self-interest
2. There is a cause that is higher than “I”

ILLUSTRATION: Adoniram Judson & Nancy Hasseltine Judson → Neng Thang, Rangoon, Burma

Consider *anguish* of Adoniram and Nancy, of their parents, of the parents of co-labourers who died without accomplishing so much as a year of missionary service.

Consider *fruit* of Neng Thang and others — but also consider *anguish* of Neng Thang today, serving God in a military dictatorship:

“Since 1962 Myanmar has been under the military rule of the State Peace & Development Council (SPDC) - formerly known as the State Law & Order Restoration Council (Slorc) - an abominable military junta. Dissent of any sort is suppressed, and political prisoners are jailed for expressing their opinions publicly.”⁵

Myanmar (Burma) is 89% Buddhist, 4% Christian (3% Baptist!) ... but my friend Neng Thang says many of the Baptists are influenced by modernism.

What shall Neng Thang say? “Father, save me from Burma?”

What shall you say? “Father, save me from ____?”

What are you interested in ahead of God’s priority in your life?

You are not called to be a <fill in the secular job blank>; you are called to be a disciple who happens to be a <fill in the secular job blank>.

II. Will Submitted (28a)

A. Necessity of conflicting self-interest (THY name, not MY name)

1. Submission can only be demonstrated when self-interest conflicts with God’s interest.
2. For the believer, the conflict becomes the opportunity for spiritual growth

“‘Glorify thy name.’ How blessed we will be if we can say this also. ‘Thy name!’ The difficulty is that we often substitute *my* for *thy* and mean ‘my name,’ or at least, ‘Thy name and my name together. We want God glorified, but not at our expense or in a way that is not that which we would choose personally.’”⁶

Jesus perfectly lived a life in God’s interest; His example is our goal.

⁵ http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south_east_asia/myanmar/

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 342

B. Self-interest overcome by God's interest: glorification of God

“Instead of praying to be delivered, this is what Jesus prays in this great hour, Father, glorify thy name!”⁷

1. Jesus is praying for His own death!
2. Jesus is praying for the salvation of men from sin!
3. But even more than that, Jesus is praying for the glorification of the Father.

“To glorify that ‘name’ is to make it stand out before men in all its truth, grace, power, and other attributes; for the *doxa* of the Father is the sum of the divine attributes or any portion of them, and the act of *doxazein* their display.”⁸

“Jesus had asked that the Father would glorify his name; i.e., that the Father by means of his revelation in the Son would cause the radiance of his Majestic attributes to become publicly displayed, in order that men might ascribe to him the honor due unto his name.”⁹

Do you live your life so that others might honor God because of you?

After Christ's prayer, a promise is granted...

III. Promise Granted (28b)

A. I have glorified it

1. The incarnation: where the Son laid aside the robes of heaven and donned the garb of flesh
2. The childhood: where the Son who ruled angels learned to be a carpenter
3. The baptism: where the Son was anointed to be the Lamb of God who should take away the sin of the world
4. The servant: where the Son who should sit on David's throne had no where to lay His head while He healed his people

⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), p. 870

⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), p. 870-871

⁹ Hendricksen, p. 201

B. I will glorify it

1. The cross: where the Son took on Himself the wrath of God for the sins of mankind
2. The empty tomb: where the Son showed Himself to have the power to forgive sins and grant eternal life
3. The coming Christ: where the Son *will* return to set all things in order and rule the world in the name of the Father

The Father's name <i>will</i> be glorified — but will it be glorified by you?

Conclusion:

“Well we will learn from the Master, who when his soul was troubled breathed this prayer, ‘Father, glorify Thy name.’ In other words, if I must lose My health, glorify Thy name by My sickness. If I must lose My wealth, glorify Thy name by My poverty. If I must lose My good name, glorify Thy name by My humiliation. If I must lose My life, glorify Thy name by My death and send the Resurrection.”¹⁰

God chooses to glorify His name in some cases by cutting lives short by death.

God chooses to glorify His name by allowing His servants to endure sickness.

God chooses to glorify His name by using men to lead others to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Whatever it be, do you make this prayer your prayer, “Father, glorify thy name”?

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 341