

The Will of God - Part 1

by T. Austin-Sparks

The will of God is His eternal purpose and plan for humanity, which is to bring people to know and follow Him.

Duration: 57:17

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, Joshua 1:8, Matthew 4:4

Topics: "Will Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of diligently teaching and obeying the word of God. He refers to the book of Joshua as a resumption of God's will and purpose after a nation's failure. The preacher quotes Deuteronomy 4:1-2, which instructs the Israelites to listen to God's statutes and judgments in order to live and possess the promised land. He also highlights the significance of Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, and encourages the congregation to meditate on and obey the scriptures.

Transcript

These gatherings and the ministry today are based upon a three-fold supposition or assumption. One is that you have come here together because you have a very real concern to know the will of God. The other is that you are quite prepared to consider anything that may be a help in that direction.

And the third, that you are of a mind to obey any light that the Lord may give as to his will. Given that foundation, I think the Lord will find a clear way of meeting us and speaking to us today. The business of any servant of the Lord is perhaps in many ways by many parts to bring his people to know what his will is concerning them.

And that is what is on the heart of this servant of the Lord, if he may please, to make you a little clearer, give you a little fuller understanding of what that good and perfect will of God is. Come back to that specifically as we go on. Now, the Bible, which is our charter, the charter of the Christian faith, is just altogether occupied with that one thing.

It's always helpful to know what it's all about after all. You can read your Bible, read through the various books, quite a lot of things you would perhaps skip, find rather tedious, a lot of things you might not understand. But the whole Bible altogether is concerned with just this one thing, the will of God.

And it is as well to read the Bible everywhere in that relationship, what has this to do with the will of God, because that is the thing that the whole Bible is occupied with. It's all about that. And by way of

introduction to our specific message today, what is it the Bible is occupied with in other words? It is a revelation of God moving according to purpose.

It's only another way of speaking about the will of God. God is seen from the very first words of the Bible to the last, moving according to purpose, moving in purpose and moving with purpose. God who is motivated by an object, one final all-inclusive object, which we understand in New Testament language as God's eternal purpose.

The first section of the Bible, first five books, just to show us so clearly, fully and meticulously, God moving according to purpose. It's a section of movement forward, isn't it? And as though when you come to the fifth of those books, the book of Deuteronomy, there is a retrospective aspect, a looking back with this word, that thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee. Even that retrospective aspect has a forward aspect connected with it.

The remembering is related to what is to be yet. You know it's the book of the people between a past history and a new history of the future. And it is looking back to pick up the lessons of the past in order to carry them into the future.

So you move out of Deuteronomy into Joshua with this forward movement, with all that the past history has taught as the foundation. And how, may I repeat, how meticulous the Lord is in that book. You should read it again in this light.

He is reiterating, re-emphasizing. He is laying a very sound and a very particular foundation for the future. It's important to note that in the light of what we are going to say today.

For we are going to be occupied with God's laws by which his will, which is his purpose, is realized, fulfilled, accomplished in his people. Here in this first section it's all with the future in view, the will of God governing. The last section of the Old Testament, the prophets, that section is occupied with the tragedy of lost purpose.

The cry of the prophets that God's will has not been realized and fulfilled. It's a tragic cry of failure and disappointment over this thing. You must listen to that because, you see, when you listen to these prophets, hear their cry, anguished cry over this people.

You are hearing just this, what God meant has not been realized and that's a terrible thing. That's a terrible thing. Prophets have a voice of tragedy, pathos and anguish because God has been disappointed over his purpose in this people.

And they have missed what he intended for them. So you have the Old Testament founded. We are not here occupied with the whole of the Old Testament.

We just noticed this in connection with this will of God. It is a tremendous thing, the will of God. I'm talking about the big will of God, the comprehensive will of God.

I'm not talking about, shall I call the little wills of God. You are every day occupied with what is the Lord's will for me in this and that hundred and one things. No, that's not what I'm talking about.

All those, mark you, all those expressions of the divine will in the particular matters and situations, all those are gathered into the big will. And until you get into the big will, you really haven't got the ground for

the little wills of God, the particular application. Turn over to the New Testament.

The first section of the New Testament is what? God taking up his purpose again. And he's taking it up in the person of his Son. And here in the person of his Son, you have the purpose and will of God embodied, personified.

It's all gathered now into a person. It has been expressed, the writer of the Hebrew letter says, expressed in many different ways, by many portions, at different times. Now the whole thing is summed up in the person of Jesus Christ who says, I am come to do thy will.

This whole will and purpose of God, therefore, is personified or incarnated in Jesus Christ. God's Son. And although you have heard it a thousand times, many, many messages given on it, it may not have occurred to you that there is one statement of the Lord Jesus which comprehends all this.

Know it so well, John Gospel, I am the way, the truth, and the life. That is a comprehensive statement as to the whole will of God. I am the way.

What do you have a way for? To get somewhere. A way implies a go. A going to a go.

A moving toward an object. I am the way of this eternal purpose of God. I am the way of its realization.

I am the way, the embodiment of the will of God. I am come to do thy will. Oh my God.

The way is a person. The truth, so immense is that simple clause or definition as to be, as to call for many hours. Men have been preaching on that for centuries.

The truth. I am set, he is saying in effect, in a realm which has been deceived and led away from the will of God. Away from the divine purpose.

A world that is now a lie in its constitution. I am the truth. Over against all that which is false in the human race, in the creation, in this universe.

If the will of God is an all-comprehending, vast and great, the lie of the devil is an immense thing. And it is something that has got to be overcome in you and in me. In the whole race.

Truth put into our constitution. Destroy that lie that is there. Dare not dwell more upon that, but indicating what we are concerned with.

Will of God. You shall know the truth. The truth shall make you free.

We talk about conversion. People being converted. You know, a fundamental factor in conversion, which means turning around in the opposite way, is turning from what is false to what is true.

Coming into the truth of God. As to why we have a being in his purpose. Why he is dealing with us as he is according to his will, that great will.

What it all means, the truth about this. Don't you and I need every day to know the good of that conversion? The real true meaning of God in Christ for us. The way, the truth, the life.

But far too small an idea of this, of it. There is a marvellous statement which has arrested me, great force, in the letter of Paul to the Colossians, where he speaks of the life which God foreordained unto his glory.

Life in the eternal counsels of God, the thoughts of God before ever the world was created, and man upon it.

God's hope was centred in this thing called life. Life. That is the battle of the ages, isn't it? That is the key to so much life.

What God means by life. The life of God's eternal purpose. The life of God's all-captivating will.

The life which he is, the Lord Jesus. We are on a day called Good Friday. We were reading this morning about this.

And I was impressed again. When he coming from the sentence of crucifixion, toward the hill, Simon carrying his cross, the women of Jerusalem weeping, wailing. He turned to them and he said, Women of Jerusalem, weep not for me.

Weep not for me. There's no need to weep for me. You weep for yourself and your children.

Weep not for me. What does that say? What does that say? Why, this cross, toward which he is going, on which he is going so soon to be impaled, all that is going to fall upon him there, that's not the end of it. That's not the end.

They may have thought so. Oh no, he knew it. Tears for him were not justified even then.

Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. Life, not death. Life.

This is how he was going to secure that for which he had come, which God had intended for man, all down the ages and from before the world. I am the truth. Dear friends, we can't get outside of that.

We comprehended what those three terms mean. That's the end of it. Composite? Has it not? Well, no.

The New Testament then introduces this eternal will and purpose of God in a person. And I am only in my introduction for this morning, even yet. The rest of the New Testament is what? We try to comprehend the Word of God.

What is all the rest of the New Testament about after the Gospels? It is simply the working out of those three things. All the rest of the New Testament is gathered into the way that Christ is. The truth that is in Jesus.

The life that is by his death and resurrection. All the New Testament is that. Read it like that.

What is this? Let me pick up any part of it. What is it? What is talking to me? About the way. Christ.

The way. The truth. The life.

Having said that, we can perhaps come to our particular passage or message for the morning. We must read some scripture to get to this. You then please take your Bible.

We begin in the book of Joshua and then go back a bit. The book of Joshua, chapter 1 and verse 8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein. For then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success, or as the margin says, deal wisely.

Now we go back to Deuteronomy, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2. And now, O Israel, hearken unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live and go in and possess the land which the Lord thy God, the God of your fathers, giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you. Chapter 6, from verse 6. These words which I command thee this day shall be upon thine heart.

Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house, and upon thy gate. Gospel by Matthew, chapter 4, and verse 4. He answered and said, It is written, Men shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Divine laws are realizing the divine purpose, are knowing to doing the will of God, which is the ultimate thing in Christianity. And here it is perfectly clear, the law of the absolute government of the word of God. We read from Joshua, and you know what Joshua is.

You have intimated already that the book of Joshua is the resumption after a nation's failure and perishing in the wilderness, the resumption of the divine will and purpose, moving now forward under that government. And right there at the beginning, this new movement, and all that is involved in it, all that it means against the repetition of the failure that has been, and the tragedy, unto fullness of life, the foundation is the meticulous observance of the word of God. The word and the will of God go together.

And there is no progress, dear friends, in this great calling with which you and I are called. In the mind, the purpose, the will of God, there is no progress only by the word of God, obedience to the word, cherishing of the word, binding the word upon our lives in all matters. I have said how meticulous the Lord was in that book of Deuteronomy because on the one side of the terrible tragedy that had taken place and because on the other side of the tremendous prospect without which there was no prospect for the people of God.

And he is there chapter after chapter, chapter after chapter saying remember what I said, remember what I said, remember cold remembrance, all that I have said to you. And all our prospect is the government of God's people who had been forty years on probation in the wilderness. And the one thing that stood over that forty years of probation was a testing of the heart as to the word of God.

Remember Deuteronomy chapter 8? Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness. Try this. Whether thou wouldest keep his commandment or not, whether thou wouldst obey his word, one place his word hath in your heart, probation of life is always that, the testings of a wilderness experience, the trials of the journey, all the experiences in God's mind are to see what is in our heart.

Whether we really have a heart for the Lord, whether after all our professions and protestations, the will of God really is the thing which governs our whole life. Try yourself whether thou wouldst test him by the word of God. We know it, perhaps daily we know something of this.

We are going to bring that very near as we go on. And so we come to Joshua and the new phase begins with a reaffirmation. On the other side of Jordan, a reaffirmation that the word of God is to be kept always before their face, on their arms, on their forehead, on their home threshold, always there to govern.

They were a called people, called by God out of Egypt. They were called by his name, they were called. But the calling is not enough, we've all been called.

We are the called, the Lord, here today. But then after the call comes the testing. We know that is true.

And then when the testing has been proved, the chosen. Called, tested and chosen. Well, everything as you see then and in the word of God turned and turns upon this one thing, the government of his word.

Disaster, disaster where the word of God was not honoured. Calamity because of failure in what God had made known as to his will. And how again and again we find in the Old Testament disaster, attending, a failure to keep the word of God before.

Even this Moses, and I always have a bad feeling when I think about it and read about it. This man who had sacrificed so much and suffered so much for this people at last, forbidden by the Lord to ask any more that he might go into the land. Ask me no more about this, says the Lord.

But, the Lord had said something and Moses had not meticulously observed what the Lord had said. Well, you say terrible, terrible, it's a hard God. But you must remember that it was not just Moses.

Moses is in glory. He has attained and obtained now. He was with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration sitting in the glory.

Not Moses, it was the people forever afterward had got to learn this lesson. You cannot, you cannot violate anything that the Lord has said without forfeiting something, losing something. We remember again David bringing up the ark up to Jerusalem making the new cart on which disaster on the way.

Calamity. The whole thing about which they seemed to be having such a good time. Feeling that they were being prospered and blessed of the Lord unto them.

That precedes the Lord. As I died before the Lord. And David was angry with the Lord that day.

Turned the ark aside and went and sulked. Nurse his grievance with the Lord. And he got over that.

We get over it. We do get over those things. We had those bad times with the Lord.

But when we get over them the Lord is able to show the meaning. So David went back to his Bible. To his Bible.

To the word of the Lord. And found the discrepancy. There the Lord had not said thou shalt make a new cart.

It was not in the words at all. Indeed that was another heathen idea. Then David saw and said oh it is written.

It is written by implication not a cart. The Levites shall carry it. The tragedy of that day.

The word. With all good intention the word overlooked and missed. But the Lord always doesn't overlook his word.

Maybe many secret tragedies in our lives. Maybe many arrests in our spiritual progress. Not because we didn't mean well.

Not because our motive wasn't. But good motive, best motive may just miss the particular thought of God. And God does not substitute a good motive for something that he has laid down as law.

And God does not substitute a good motive for something that he has laid down as law. See we are pressed with something aren't we this morning. This sounds very terrible I know but we haven't got through yet.

Here we are. The government of the word of God. And in all these things it was invariably one thing.

And this dear friends is where our hearts are going to be really touched. It was not just a sort of legal mechanical way observing some statement in the bible. The issue was very much bigger than that.

If you will look at every such instance. The big and the small. The larger and the particular.

You will see that it was always a matter of the Lord's presence. We talked about Joshua. You remember Ai? What had the Lord said about the principles of our spiritual progress? You know what he said.

And they came to Ai. And you know what Achan did? He violated the word of God and the whole of Israel was arrested in their progress. Brought to a standstill and it was a scene of tragedy.

But what was the real tragedy? The manifest presence of the Lord wasn't it? Isn't that everything? Oh we don't want anything greater than that. Surely no heart here has any interest in anything in this life and in this world apart from if only we know that the Lord is with us. Oh what a lot.

A lot of victories. A lot of strength. Yes there may be conflict.

There was with Joshua afterward. Conflict. Terrible assaults.

There may be many problems and many difficulties in life. But if only we are assured that the Lord is with us. That's everything isn't it? Is it to you? I tell you that's my battleground.

The devil is so cruel. Using the very disciplines of God to bring us into his greater fullness. Using those trials as accusations against God and inside of us making us feel because of this situation of circumstance, this trial, this difficulty, this thing that is so hard.

The Lord is with us. Don't you listen to that lie. You'll be absolutely worsted.

Ruled out of all the conflict and the possession. If you take on that lie of the devil, what can we do without that? How can we get on without that? What would our meetings be but for the prayer? Our prayer meetings. Only we are able to say the Lord was with us.

The Lord was there. We knew the Lord's presence. That's life isn't it? That's strength.

Now all that in the Bible as you see hung upon this word of God. He is with us according to his word, on the basis of his word. And only with us as his word has its place in our heart.

The early apostle says let the word of God dwell in you. Ritually. And all spiritual wisdom has understood.

The Lord stood back at Ai. The Lord stood back. Now then.

The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. You see he is present as the jealous trustee of the word, will and purpose of God.

Oh I thank God for that. Don't you? You're hearing what I'm saying. You say this is rather oppressive.

This is rather heavy. Rather exacting, demanding. But that's all truth and right.

But the Holy Spirit. For what has he come? Why is he here? Why is he in us? He is as I have said the jealous custodian of the word of God. On the one side very watchful.

He is referred to as the seven spirits of God that is. The complete spiritual knowledge. The Holy Spirit here.

In trust with if I may put it this way. The will of God. In trust with the purpose of God.

In trust with therefore the word of God. For these things all go together. Presence of the Holy Spirit.

The known presence of the Holy Spirit. The working of the energy of the Holy Spirit. It's all in this connection.

To bring us by way of the word of God. To the end. To which we have been called.

The word of God is the ground of the Holy Spirit's act. See it here illustrated in the Old Testament. The spirit of God is in charge.

He's the captain of the host of the Lord. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit has come to dwell within. To just keep us on the line of the word of God.

If we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Without perhaps knowing the particular scripture that applies. For the moment.

We are just out of adjustment. There's something that does not say the pause in us. The Holy Spirit knows why that is.

If we will go to the Lord. Seek the Lord about it. Turn to his word.

The Lord will just put his finger upon something. That's been there all the time. And hear my voice.

Yes the Holy Spirit has come for this. It's the ground of his working. And let me say to the young Christians.

Say out loud. A long experience. That although you may not understand.

You may not understand a great deal of it. You may not just seem to enjoy it. Read it.

Enjoy it or not enjoy it. Understand it or not understand it. Read it.

Work at it. Even if it's labor. Endow to it.

You know you've got a tape recorder inside of you. We have a lot of tapes in the office. A lot of tapes of messages.

Spread over many years. Sometimes one is asked for. And we look out.

Just occasionally I want to hear a bit of that. Did I say that? You know we've got a tape recorder inside. You notice this.

Interesting thing. You. Someone's name.

It comes up and you wonder. When was it? I always give it up. Do you? Now if you understand anything about psychology.

I hear something like that and my folks say he's gone away. I'm not looking up anywhere for it. But I've learned something.

And I let go. In a few minutes or perhaps. I'll ask you for an answer.

Where's that come from? Your tape recorder. Speaking back. Perhaps over the years.

It comes back. Have you had that experience? Supposing you give it up altogether. Well I've forgotten that.

But you get down to it. Now the word of God is like that. I am so glad that in my early Christian life.

I set myself to a systematic study of the Bible. Book by book. Though I didn't understand.

Many things today I don't understand. I read some things in the Bible yesterday that I didn't like. Many things then I didn't understand.

And I could have closed the book because it didn't seem to mean anything. But I worked at it. I worked at it.

I analysed the book. Without spiritual understanding. But I worked.

Aren't I glad today? If I have any spiritual ministry today. It's the Holy Spirit working upon what is there. The word is there.

The Spirit works upon the word. In time of need. It becomes more than the word.

Young Christians. Don't give up the Bible. And the time will come when you'll say.

Thank God for that. One of the greatest, if not the greatest Bible expositors of this last century. He'd say to me once.

Sometimes there's such a weariness. Such a weariness in my heart. The Spirit works upon the word.

Remember that. Give him his ground. It's the ground of spiritual progress.

By the Holy Spirit. There may be an unconcern. You may not know which sector it is.

But he is working. The thing is written inside. The new covenant.

Now that's the beginning. A statement. Strong statement.

But what does this mean after all? You may still see things said. Progress. Spiritual progress.

In the will of God. Unto the full purpose of God. In our calling.

Demands. Will not be made without a very meticulous observance of what is in the Bible. Now why this word? Why this word today? Oh this has borne dear friends out of a tremendous amount of exercise over recent years.

Why the weakness of Christianity? Why the weakness of so many Christians? Why the slowness of their spiritual progress? The failure of so many. I have the answer. There's no doubt about it.

Because I can put my finger upon a large number of things that are there in the word of God. They are there. Plain to be seen as anything can be.

And I look at those Christians I see that in their behavior. In their appearance. In their conduct and way of going on.

And their relationships. There is just as clear and definite a contradiction of what is there in the Bible. As anything could be.

The Bible has something to say about anything that you can think of. Prescribes for anything that you could ever think of. If I mention some of the things that it mentions you'd be surprised.

What is the meaning of the tragedy of many marriages? That's a practical point isn't it? Then you go back to that. Why did the marriage take place? On what ground? A fascination? An infatuation? An emotion? An impulse? A desire to be married anyhow? Tragedy? Because that marriage was not based upon a real spiritual relatedness. The first thing the word says, and you know it precisely.

Be not unequally yoked together with unbelief. Are you going to make spiritual progress? Do you violate that? No. Certainly tragedy sooner or later.

I take that as an example. I could take many things like that in the word that I am seeing in Christianity today. And I am trying to be very thankful with you young Christians.

I am concerned for you. Deeply. But you do not miss God's best.

God's fullest. No. That depends upon you having the word of God in you that the Holy Spirit can say.

Of course there is another side to it isn't there? I have to be faithful and I want to be serious on this matter because it is a present issue. I have no doubt about it. It is a real issue in Christianity today.

Christianity that is being produced today. You older Christians are bearing with me. God's fullest and God's best.

I am saying to you that you are being serious about the word of God. God always likes to turn to the other side. To feel there is no impediment.

There is no restraint. There is a clear way. The presence of the Lord is very real.

Heaven is open. I know of nothing more blessed in all life than those times. You have no clarity between you and the Lord.

The Lord's presence is so real, so wonderful. I wish it were always like that. We sing the hymn, There have been seasons.

Abide with me and they shall never be. Well that is the wrong way of putting it. Let me abide with thee and they shall never be.

Deviations. But there is nothing more precious in all human history than this joy of this peace of God. Days, hours, weeks.

Spiritual ecstasy by the Lord. And so it is worth it. It is worth it to be obedient.

To let his word rule in our hearts as the scripture says. Rule in our hearts. And when Jesus was dealing with the devil in the wilderness, you know what he was dealing with, don't you? Dealing with a person.

All right. Leaving the personality of the devil. Dealing with an evil person.

Yes, no doubt about that. He was dealing with very much more than that. He was dealing with the whole issue of life and death.

The devil was trying to get him, coerce him, tempt him, constrain him, compel him to take away what was out of the will of God which would mean his premature death. A death which would be death and not victory. He was dealing with this whole issue of life and death.

And so underline and encircle the word. It is written, man shall not live. Put that in a positive way, ruling out the negative clause.

Man shall live. Live, live. Suffer the word of exhortation.

I was very near to despairing a little while ago, especially in the realm of ministry. And I got to the Lord. Suffer this personal word.

And the Lord turned me to a scripture and hit me like a sledgehammer with it. Preach the word. Be instant.

In season. That's very easy. Out of season.

When everything says this is not the time. Reprove. Rebuke.

You had too much reproof this morning. Too much rebuke. Give the word.

It's bliss. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. And you will go on the way.

Unimpeded. So we bow for a moment. Word of God.

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