

CHAPTER V

THE WILL OF GOD

There was nothing the prodigal son could have done, in the course of his life in the far country that would have pleased his father. Had he lived an exemplary life instead of a dissolute one; had he lived in peace with all his neighbors and promoted peace in his community; had he become very successful through honesty, hard work and persistence; had he lived an extraordinarily moral life to the point of perfection; had he become a faithful husband and parent and sired beautiful, well disposed sons and daughters; had he given all his wealth to the poor and provided for orphans and the homeless; had he become a great national leader who brought peace and prosperity to the far country – none of it would have pleased his father, to whom he was in any case dead. His father wanted absolutely only one thing of him. The one and only thing that he could do to please his father was . . . come home! He had immigrated to the land of the dead and the lost where he could do nothing and be nothing except dead and lost. When at last he arose and went to his father's house, he had done the one thing that pleased his father, whose great joy was precipitated by the sight of the returning prodigal.

Why? Because the dead had returned to life, the lost had been found! Furthermore, there was not a single word of rebuke concerning the dissolute life he had lived or the fact that he had squandered his inheritance. The very most he had dared hope was to be received as a hired servant. Imagine his shock when he began to realize, in the midst of all the joy and the great celebration, that he was again invested as a son with full privileges!

The Father's Exclusive Will

This has to tell us something very profound about the will of God our Father – that, insofar as we are concerned, He wills one simple thing: come home! This and nothing more! But if our will, like that of the early Prodigal Son, is to pursue life in this world, our far country, we are dead to the Father and nothing we can do here either pleases or displeases Him. All attachments or devotions we have to this world – to its persons and its institutions – are bonds that secure us from turning to the Father's house. This includes our attachments to our earthly families – our parents, our spouses, our children. This includes our attachments to the state and nation. This includes our attachments to life itself. That is why Jesus couched his Great Principle in the strongest possible term: hate. It is only the one who hates parents, spouse, children, and one's own life, who can be a disciple (Luke 14:26). It is the one who hates life in this world who can receive life eternal (John 12:25). That results from the fact that the will of the Father is eternal life and has no fulfillment in terms of temporal life.

Jesus' Use of the Expression, Will of God(The Father)

This is a supremely radical interpretation, and one cannot accept it on the sole basis of inferences from a single parable. Let us now investigate Jesus' use of the expression, "will of the Father," or equivalent expressions, to see whether he otherwise confirms this conclusion drawn from the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We will focus on the following utterances:

- For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent

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me (John 6:38).

- 2. Pray then like this: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9,10).
- 3. Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).
- 4. Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done (Luke 22:42).
- 5. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:40).

I repeat for emphasis that the Father wants only one thing, absolutely one thing only – that we arise and go to him. So, Jesus defined the will of God:

This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:39,40).

This is the final, absolute and definitive expression of the will of God. The Father's will, therefore, pertains only to the resurrection when his children rise to be with him, in the Father's house, precisely as the prodigal son arose and went to his father. God's will has no direct relevance to this world. Thus, and only thus, could the Prodigal perform the Father's will while in the far country. He was outside his father's will until he resolved in his heart, I will arise and go to my Father. That arising – that resurrection – to go to the Father is the will of God in its totality. It is clear that the Father does not want his children to be in this world, and there is therefore nothing we can accomplish in this world that will please him except this arising to go to him. He wants us in his house with Him, in His Eternal Glory, just as the prodigal's father wanted the younger son to return to Him.

There was absolutely nothing the Prodigal could do, in the far country, to please his father – except to make that wonderful resolve to arise and go. So likewise, there is absolutely nothing we can do here in our far country to please the Father except to arise (in the resurrection) and go to him, or to do what contributes to this end. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Father, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven", this is the only thing he had in mind. Jesus, in his last hours, precisely like any human being, was mightily tempted to avoid his terrible death and so maintain his bond to this world. It was this restraining bond that would have prevented his going to the Father that he struggled mightily against in Gethsemane when he prayed, "Father, not my will but thine be done."

His struggle was exactly the same as is ours – the struggle against the temptation to save his life in this world, and so to lose life eternal. So, the cross symbolizes the victory of the Son of God over the temptation to save his life, just as it symbolizes the commitment we also must make if we are to have eternal life with the Father. But, thanks be unto God that he claimed the victory and arose to be with his Father. That our struggle, and our temptation, is exactly the same as his he made perfectly clear when he said,

If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Luke 9:23).

And,

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple (Luke

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14:27).

Jesus did not die on the cross instead of us, but for us; not as our substitute but as our leader, showing the way. We each must bear his own cross and follow him.

Our Father in heaven loves his children and he wants all of them to be in his house with him, sharing with him in all good things. That is the only will of God to be considered by us, for that is all he has shown us in Jesus. That is the only thing he wants of us or for us. Then it follows that the only way we can be in his will, or do his will, is to want the same thing for ourselves. This puts us in the state of the prodigal son on the day he came to his wonderful resolve, "I will arise and go to my father."

The New Testament Greek word translated "arise" is *anastasis*, and comes from the same root as the word that is translated resurrection. Only by his resurrection, by arising to go to his father, could the prodigal son do the will of his father; in like manner, only by arising to go to the Father, in the Resurrection, can we do the will of the Father in heaven. Recognizing that we must nevertheless live out our time on earth, lest we be tempting God (Deuteronomy. 6:16, Matthew 4:7), the only way we can do the will of the Father while we remain here is by the maintenance of a commitment to the Resurrection.

This commitment to the Resurrection is contrary to any commitment to anything in this life or in this world. When this commitment is valid and complete, all our treasures are in the Father's house; all we value is in the Father's house; all our family relations are forged in the Father's house and we want only to go there. We therefore hate our lives in this world, as mandated by the Great Principle. Then, we want exactly the same things for ourselves that our Father in heaven wants for us. Our wills conform to his will and we are righteous in his sight. Indeed, unless and until we come to this state of mind and heart, loving the Father and wanting only to go to him, we are, like the prodigal son, both dead and lost. That is why he who loves his life loses it (John 12:25).

When Jesus said, ". . .for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38), it is this will of the Father that was in his mind. He proceeded immediately to define the Father's will, not once but twice, and in both cases the definition is completed by the statement, I will raise him (it) up at the last day. The Father's will is therefore completed by our arising to go to him, and by nothing except our arising to go to him. Here is Jesus' double definition in its totality:

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:38-40).

Jesus could do the Father's will only by holding to the Way of the cross, the Way that led through his cross to the Resurrection to the Father in such a public manner as to demonstrate to the world that this is the only way to the Father. If we would have eternal life and share in the glorious realm of the Father's house, we must each take up his or her cross and follow in that way.

When we want for ourselves only what the Father wants for us, then and only then are we in his will, then and only then are we righteous before him. And he wants only one thing of us: come home!

Satan's Temptations

Satan interceded early to prevent, if possible, Jesus doing the will of the Father on the earth. So

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he tempted him to give himself to the passions of his flesh: Command these stone to become loaves of bread (Matthew 4:3). Then he tempted him to cast himself down from the temple. This is the suicide temptation, and would have been tempting God, or putting God to the test. Finally, he offered him the kingdoms of the world. Again, Jesus was not interested, because he knew that the Father was not interested in building a kingdom on the earth. He resisted all these temptations because he knew that the Father was only interested in his returning to him and bringing with him, through the Resurrection, as many brothers and sisters as possible. So Jesus' only concerns were in losing none of the children the Father had given him and in bringing the children of God home to the Father through the Resurrection. To accomplish the Father's will, which he came to earth to do, he must teach us God's will; and since it is so unique, it was necessary that he demonstrate its significance to us through the cross and resurrection. Therefore any desire on his part to prolong or to save his life in this world was the opposite of the Father's will.

When his hour was nearing he announced to the gathered disciples what was afoot and that he was to be taken and crucified. Naturally, Jesus recognized the temptation of Satan again when Peter objected saying, "Lord, this shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22)! It was a simple temptation to save his life, and so to lose it, and he fired back, Get behind me, Satan (Matthew 16:23)! I was long puzzled by the severity of this rebuke. Peter was only expressing his concern for his Lord's welfare, or so it appears, and one is led to ponder why this identifies him with Satan until the realization comes as to the crucial issue that was at stake. Had Jesus been influenced to save his life by Peter's show of concern, he would have become but one more prodigal electing to pursue his fortune in the far country.

As the scriptures state, Jesus was subject to all the temptations that are common to man (Hebrews 4:15). To satisfy his flesh, to exalt himself among men as King or simply to save his life so as to live in this world a little longer – these worked to prevent his doing the will of the father on earth, which he had been sent to do. He must have prayed often and fervently for the Father's will to be done, which he had come to earth to do, and in addition, he instructed his disciple to also pray for the Father's will to be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven (Matthew 6:10). With Jesus' definition of the will of the Father in mind, we see that he could only have been asking them to pray for him, that he might prevail against all temptation so as to do the will of the Father in this world.

The most terrible temptation came during his agony in Gethsemane, when he was mightily tempted to seek his own will rather than the Father's by saving his life. Father, let this cup pass away from me (Matthew 26:39)! But he overcame Satan again in this final battle of the spirits so as not to save his life but only so as to endure the cross and go to the Father. He concluded each repetition of the petition with the overcoming request,

Nevertheless, Father, not my will but yours be done (Luke 22:42).

This is that will of the Father that he came to earth to do and that we are all put here to do. I say again, the will of the Father is this arising to go to him – this and nothing more.

The churchmen bear a heavy burden for having closed their ears and minds and hearts to the words of Jesus so as not to understand this will of my Father. They have persistently led us in the recitation of this Lord's Prayer, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, defining the Father's will, either implicitly or explicitly, as something we can do in co-operation with the Father to alter human life on earth. This results in trapping the minds of men and women in this misconception. So they go about seeking to build a kingdom of God on the earth, to perfect individuals, government and society in the name of Jesus and of God, and so to bind themselves to the earth and earthly endeavors, all in direct opposition to the will of the Father.

In Christendom we have this multitude of churchmen vigorously endeavoring to build the kingdom of God on the earth, when all He wants us to do is to lay down our tools and come home! Or, we

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have this other multitude of churchmen who are eagerly awaiting the return of the Lord to set up his kingdom here on the earth, who are missing the kingdom that has already come on the earth.

Now I will say it once more in the hope that some one will hear and respond to the Father appropriately: the Father has absolutely no interest in our activities on the earth. He is not even concerned about who wins wars. He wants and wills only one thing, and absolutely one thing – come home! So it is that the prodigal's father wanted only one thing from him, the very same thing – come home! It's a family thing! A loving father wants his children safe in his house. He does not want them to do anything on earth, this far country, and nothing that we can do here pleases him, except for this one thing: resolving to arise and go to the Father and holding firm to that resolve. This is the will of God as Jesus did it, so fulfilling his purpose in coming to earth. This is the will of God as we must do it, and if we seek to do anything else as the will of God, we will never do it on earth as Jesus did it and as it is done in heaven.

I have emphasized the simplicity of Jesus' gospel throughout, and here it is in its simplest, clearest form such as children readily understand – a loving father wants his children to come home. We are willfully disobedient when we are in any way otherwise minded. It is this that the Father has revealed to children through Jesus but has hidden from the wise and understanding (Matthew 11:25)! We now are in a position to see clearly what Jesus meant when he uttered the following sayings:

Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said,

Here are my mother and brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matthew 12:49,50).

Nothing that we can say to him is of any account unless we want to go to him, which is to do the Father's will. We want to go to him out of love for him who is our Father (the Great Commandment), and to leave the earth to that end (the Great Principle), and so to be his children and the children of no one other than him. The Father then lovingly and joyfully embraces us as his children, and we are, among ourselves, but brothers and sisters and mothers (no fathers), all bound together in the family of the Father. So Jesus says,

For who ever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Jesus came to do the will of the Father and to teach and demonstrate it so that we can also do the Father's will on earth. We do it by following Jesus in taking up our own crosses in the hatred of life and the love of the Father.

That's it!