

GOD FIRST

Rev. Richard Rogers

Sunday, April 7, 2024

Alright, you ready? So here's my question for you this morning: Why is heaven so heavenly? Anybody want to take a stab at it? Why is heaven so heavenly? And the companion question is: Why is earth so earthy? [Congregants laugh] We've got to vote for no judgment ... Alright! Anybody else want to vote? [Congregants shout out answers] Angels in heaven? Okay. Anybody else want to vote? Because God is? Okay.

Alright, so I'm going to give you a few words. And I'm going to invite you to see: Do these words apply – do you think they apply – more to heaven or to earth? Okay?

Now, the first one is love. Do you think love applies more to heaven or to earth? Or are they equal? You know, there's a lot of people that have had near-death experiences and have come back and said there is a profound experience of unconditional love on the other side.

What about conflict? Do you think that's more of a heavenly thing or an earthly thing? [Congregants: "Earthly thing."] Earthly thing! Good; you're catching on! [Laughs]

How about peace? Would you say peace is more of a heavenly thing or an earthly thing? [Congregants shout out answers] And the crowd murmured, right?

How about poverty? Is poverty more of an earthly thing or a heavenly thing? Earthly thing!

What about beauty? Both? How many people want to vote for both? Great!

Alright; so Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer that our prayer is "*on earth as it is in heaven.*" True? Anybody remember that? We just sang it? Ring a bell, anybody? [Congregants laugh]

So one of the things that I've been pondering is why is heaven so ... I'm going to say different than Earth. And that when people have had near-death experiences, they've talked about this profound experience that they've had on the other side. And why do you think that is?

And I think it's helpful for us to really look at that; for us to explore that; for us to understand why that is. And you could say it's angels make it that way, or God made it. But God made both. heaven and earth. So why is there a difference? And what created that difference? And is that difference mandatory?

According to Jesus, it's not. According to Jesus, we are in the process of lifting earth into a more heavenly state. But how do we do that?

I'd like to suggest today that the way that we move earth into a more heavenly experience is when we put God first. In heaven, God is the most important thing. And sometimes in earth, we're the most important thing. We live our life from our point of view; from our ego; from our desires; from what we want; what we think we need; what we think we have a right to. And from that point of view, we create a level of pain and fear and chaos sometimes, because we're not always about creating the most important thing, which is putting God first.

And when you look at your own life, how important is it to you to put God first in your life? Is it before you get your needs met? Or after you get your needs met? Like, sometimes we're all about doing it God's way as long as we think we're going to get ours in the process. [Congregants laugh]

And what would happen -- because I believe that this is an evolutionary step -- what would happen on earth if we put God first? What would happen in your life? Especially in those areas in your life where

you may be struggling? Where it may not be going as well as you had hoped, or even going the way you want it to go? Can you imagine in those moments -- as you begin to put God first in those moments -- that you're going to have a change, a transformation? Because God's will for each and every one of us is greater good! But we actually have to develop the practice of putting God first.

Jesus said the most important thing. He said when we put our focus on God – “*Seek ye first the kingdom and its righteousness*” -- and then everything else – everything else! -- is yours. That's a huge statement! That if you put God first – “*Seek ye first the kingdom and its righteousness*” -- if you do that first, then you get everything else.

But because we don't really believe that, we seek everything else first. And then, oh, by the way: What does God want?

And what if we were willing to make this evolutionary shift, and every day seek God first? Can you imagine that your life could be greater, more peaceful, more loving, more joyous? Less conflict, less upset? If every day we seek God first.

A couple of years ago, my wife and I were on vacation to the Midwest. And we were driving along, and on the side of the road was a semi that a farmer had painted in just bright, beautiful colors, “*Put God first.*” Right? It's a little ministry right there, right? He had bought an old semi-trailer, and he put it on the side of the road and painted in big, bright letters, “*Put God first.*”

And I thought to myself, “*Wow! That's really the whole Gospels in three words!*” Put God first! And the promise is: if you put God first, everything else is yours.

And I begin to actually look into my life and say: Where are the areas of my life where I feel like I'm doing that? Where I'm putting God first? That God's the most important thing? Where I'm actually seeking God and aligning myself and surrendering to God, and where am I not?

Because I don't know about you, but there were a couple areas of my life that I had drawn a circle around and said, “*God, this is off limits.*” Right? “*This is my will.*” [Congregants laugh]

Brian Houston wrote, “*You will never come in second by putting God first.*”

Nicky Gumbel said, “*Life is short; make the most of it! Put God first. Love deeply. Forgive quickly. Laugh a lot; And find and live your divine purpose.*”

In Matthew 7 we read, “*For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and the one who knocks, the door will be opened. For which one of you, if your son asks for bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asked for a fish, would give him a snake? If you then, who are evil ...*”

And it says “evil”; I think he really meant weird.

“*For you then that are weird, how many good gifts do you give your children? And how much more will your Father in heaven give you good gifts if you ask him?*”



Do we have a PowerPoint, Richard, up there? Is it there? There it is.

Here's what I want us to look at today. I believe that God's will for each and every one of us is greater than we can imagine. And I believe that God's will is so good that most of us can't even imagine it; we can't even conceive of it. And the best that we can conceive of is “my will. So here's what we do: we spend most of our time in life going after my will.

Never thinking -- never even entertaining the idea -- that there could be a higher will in every situation and that -- if you would actually just open your mind, open your heart, open your soul -- that there's a higher level of good that we can actually attain if we're actually interested in that.

But we just shoot for the best that we can conceive. The best that our mind can hold; the best that our experiences tell us is possible. And what if God's will for each and every one of us was infinitely greater? And all we had to do is then actually open our mind, our heart, our soul to that possibility to actually move to that level of life? And if we move to that level of life. that we could be wildly blessed. Wildly blessed!

And so, I'm not saying that your will isn't fabulous. I will absolutely double-dog guarantee God's will for you is infinitely greater! And I want us to be curious about that. I want us to be curious about a level of good that is greater than you can imagine right now. And what it would actually happen if we actually moved to that level of life.

You know, I did a series of talks one summer when Richard was on sabbatical. And there were five prayers that will change your life. And the first prayer was, *"Thy will be done."* And the moment we entertain that prayer -- *"They will be done"* -- it actually moves us from my will to God's will ... to Thy will. And that shift in consciousness -- that shift, that transformation in thinking -- actually opens the door to infinite possibilities! That we can actually entertain the Mind of God.

Like, if God's will for you is perfect, absolute good, would you be willing to pray on that? To meditate on that? To be curious about that? And to begin to claim a level of life that most have never even thought was possible?

"Thy will be done."

Will you say that with me?

[With congregation:] *"Thy will be done."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"Thy will be done."*

In 1 Corinthians, we read this: *"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."* I mean, there's some pretty big statements that the will of God, the goodness of God, the life of God ... That God created you with his image and in his likeness and so that we could actually move to a higher level of life, but we're here kind of arguing about our limitations. We're arguing about the scraps from the table, instead of obtaining all the good that God has for each one of us.

"Thy will be done."

Together: [with congregation] *"Thy will be done."*

One more time, just for grins: [with congregation] *"Thy will be done."*

Charles Fillmore, the co-founder of Unity, said, *"God's will is always perfection for all of his children: perfect health in mind and body; abundance of every good thing, including joy and peace and wisdom and eternal life. He will not allow suffering or imperfection in any form."*

So if God's will for you is absolute good, can you imagine starting every day by just saying in your time of prayer and meditation:

"Alright; today God, I want to know your will for my life. Not only do I want to know your will, but I want to live your will today. I want to be about that in every situation. And when my ego gets out in front, and when I get scared and believe that I have to really be committed to my own will, I want to

see that clearly so that I can actually put your will out in front of me. Because that's what I want! I want a level of life that is that good, that great, that fabulous! And I want to keep that in the foremost of my thinking: "Thy will be done."

Together: [with congregation] *"Thy will be done."*

Steve Harvey, who is a man who will tell you over and over again how blessed he has been by God, said this: *"God will do exceedingly and abundantly things above everything that I've asked or thought."* Like, he's actually playing at a level of life that is infinitely better than he thought was possible!

And what I want you to see is that that is true for all of us! That there's a level of life that's available to all of us to each and every one of us, because we are created in the image and likeness of God! Because we are created in God's image, that is available to all of us! But we actually have to open to the possibility that what we're living right now may not be the fullness of what is available to us. And if we keep looking down and just seeing "what is," we miss the possibility of "what could be."

And what if you can't trust your past as the barometer of what's available? What if you actually have to open your mind and heart and soul to a level of life that is greater? That you can actually know and live and experience the glory of God?

"Thy will be done."

Together: [with congregation] *"Thy will be done."*

Jacob Latimore said, *"Keep God first, chase your dreams and everything will pay off."*

David Jeremiah said, *"When I put God first, God takes care of me and energizes me to do what it really needs to be done."*

Charles Hummel said, *"Here's the secret of Jesus' life and the work for God. He prayerfully weighted his Father's instructions and for the strength to follow them. Jesus had ..."*

And I want you to hear this!

"... Jesus had no divine blueprint. He discerned the power of God Father's will day by day in a life of prayer."

And I want you to see that! Because that's a huge statement! Because many of us believe that, when Jesus showed up, he understood exactly what was going to happen over and over again. And what if he didn't? What if every day he was just trying to discern God's will for that day, and was asking for it; inviting it; and living it; and asking for the strength that he could do it day after day after day.

And he watched one miracle after another happen simply because he put God first. He kept showing up and he put God first.

So where in your life today are you struggling? Where in your life does the challenge feel overwhelming? Is it in your family? Your work? In your finances? In your health? Where's your challenge? And in the place where you feel the most challenged today -- where life feels the hardest -- are you willing to take a step back and simply say, *"Thy will be done"*? And ask to understand the will of God in that very situation; in that moment; in that experience, so that you can actually move into a higher possibility of what could be?

There's a level of life that, if we are willing to entertain it -- if we're willing to have our mind and heart and soul expanded to the point that we can see the will of God -- we can actually move into a higher level of being.

"Thy will be done."

Together: [with congregation] *"Thy will be done."*

Sometimes life is hard. Has everybody experienced that at least once? [Congregants laugh] Like, sometimes it's hard. And sometimes the thing that we want the most seems the hardest to touch, to grab, to live. And what I believe in my own life -- and it's in those moments where I was so committed: I was more committed to my will than Thy will. I was more committed to making sure I got what I wanted, that it never occurred to me in those moments to simply take a step back and see a bigger picture and say, *"Thy will be done."*

"Thy will be done."

Together: [with congregation] *"Thy will be done."*

See, I truly believe that we are at an evolutionary step on our planet. That we can keep living from our ego; we can keep living and creating more and more of what we want. And struggling and fighting and making sure we get our share and our needs and for us and our family and our little world. Or we can decide today that there might be something better: really better!

And that the will of God is a promise made to all of us. That God wouldn't put us -- create us in this world -- and put us here for us to struggle for 70, 80, 90 years. **That we're actually here to create the kingdom of heaven right here, right now.** But to do that, we have to open our mind to a possibility that is infinitely greater. And the greatest prayer is simply, *"Thy will be done."*

Together: [with congregation] *"Thy will be done."*

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God today. Today, our job is to decide if we can surrender our will, our ego, our fears, our concerns, and turn them over to God. And believe that God is in charge of our life, just the way it is. So in all things we look to God, and in all things we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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