

SERMON NOTES

Sunday, August 3

Synaxis Gospel

John 6:39-47

THE WILL OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John is unique among the Gospels. All of them are influenced by the Old Testament Scriptures, but John seems to follow its pattern. The Creation story of Genesis is retold in the first chapter of John with stress laid upon the work of the Word—God Who became the man, Jesus Christ. The second chapter shows Jesus again creating from water for the benefit and joy of a man and a woman. The third chapter hints again at the work of the Spirit of God, Who brooded over the primordial waters and creation began. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again of water and the Spirit to see the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel of John moves on to follow the pattern of the second book of the Old Testament, Exodus. As the Israelites in their forty year trek through the desert learned that God provides the physical water that we need to sustain physical life,¹ so in chapter four of John, the Samaritan woman seeking physical water learned that only Jesus Christ provides the spiritual water—the Holy Spirit—that we need to live eternally. Moreover, just as the Israelites were told by the LORD, “I am your Healer,” at the waters of Marah,² Jesus demonstrated that, He, indeed, is our Healer when He healed the man at the pool of Bethesda recorded in John 5.³

The next event in Exodus was the story of the hungry Israelites being fed miraculously with Manna from heaven.⁴ In John 6, the Apostle records the Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the 5,000 men along with women and children. This account is followed by a later discussion between Jesus and those witnessing the miracle. The first part of that discussion in which Jesus explained that He is the Living Bread from heaven was covered in the Sermon Notes for September 14.

¹ Exodus 15:22-25; again in Exodus 17 where the LORD provided water from the rock.

² Exodus 15:26. Marah means ‘bitterness.’ It can also mean ‘rebellious.’ The LORD told Moses to cast a certain tree into the bitter waters and when he did so the water became sweet. It is easy to see a certain parallel with that tree and the Cross of Jesus Christ that changes the bitterness of sin and disobedience of our lives into a life of sweetness with God. Bethesda means ‘house of mercy.’

³ Even more importantly, He is our spiritual Healer. Isaiah in his prophesies of the Crucifixion, writes: “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.” –Isaiah 53:5.

⁴ Exodus 16:2-36.

The next big milestone in Exodus was the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai, the will of God for His people so that they might understand what sin is and therefore avoid it. None of us have been able to keep His Law and so we need a Savior from its penalty. In our reading in chapter 6 of his Gospel, John will show us God's greater will in Jesus Christ.

SYNTAXIS READING

John 6:39-47

And this is the will of Him Who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

The Jews therefore were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven."

And they were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know: How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me, unless the Father Who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

It is written in the Prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One Who is from God; He has seen the Father.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life."

NOTES

And this is the will of Him Who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

The will of God was mentioned in this reading in the verse just prior. Jesus has come down from heaven to do the will of God, the will of the One Who sent Him.

The will of God is given in two directives to Christ. 1) That Christ should not lose any of those given to Him. 2) That Christ should raise them up on the last day.

Who are those given to Christ by the Father? Those who have responded to the call of God, as Jesus says in His further explanation below⁵: those who have heard the voice of God and have learned from Him. These the Father has given to the Son and none will be lost (perish). The prophet Isaiah records that the LORD speaking metaphorically of His salvation calls out to all:

“HO EVERYONE WHO THIRSTS, COME TO THE WATER;
AND YOU WHO HAVE NO MONEY COME, BUY AND
EAT.

COME BUY WINE AND MILK WITH OUT MONEY AND
WITHOUT COST.

WHY DO YOU SPEND MONEY FOR WHAT IS NOT
BREAD, AND YOUR WAGES FOR WHAT DOES NOT
SATISFY?

INCLINE YOUR EAR AND COME TO ME.
LISTEN, THAT YOU MAY LIVE;

AND I WILL MAKE AN EVERLASTING COVENANT
WITH YOU.”⁶

Our Lord will resurrect all those who belong to the Father and are given into His care. The “last day” is the Day of Judgment. The resurrection of the righteous is a separate resurrection from the general resurrection of all men for the purpose of judgment. Jesus is no doubt referring here to this special resurrection of the righteous in which they too, will answer for the way they have lived their lives. Based on that record, they will receive their rewards.⁷ For them, however, there will be no danger of losing their eternal life.

Jesus repeats this statement about this resurrection three times, here and in the verses that follow. This is a firm and unbreakable promise made by our Living God. Death cannot, will not hold those who belong to God by faith in His Son.

For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

The will of God is further defined concerning those who belong to Him.

They ‘behold’ the Son. This is not simply physically seeing Jesus Christ. Most people who have ever lived have never had that opportunity. To ‘behold’ the Son is to spiritually grasp Him, to spiritually understand Who He is.

Once a person who belongs to God understands Who Jesus Christ is, s/he believes in Him—trusts Him. S/he believes He is trustworthy to do all that He has promised.

Those who understand and trust are given eternal life.

⁵ John 6:45

⁶ Isaiah 55:1-3

⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:6-15

Jesus emphasizes that He, Himself, personally, will resurrect that person who understands, trusts and has been given the gift of eternal life.

The Jews therefore were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”

The Jews: Although John, and Jesus for that matter, were ethnic and religious Jews themselves, John usually used the term to refer to those religious people opposed to Jesus, in this case, Galileans. Here we see them grumbling about Jesus’ statement.

All that Jesus had said about His Father’s will apparently flew right over their heads. They had stopped listening once they heard Him say, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”

And they were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know: How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?”

They were expecting perhaps a second Moses. Someone who could do the sort of miracles that they believed Moses had done—although Jesus had just corrected their misinterpretation of Psalm 78:24 (It had not been Moses who had caused the Manna to fall in the desert; it had been God who sent the bread.)

Still, if Jesus had brought down Manna, they would perhaps have accepted Him—as a second Moses. But Moses had been a normal man, from earth. That Jesus seemed to be claiming that He was *not* from earth was incredible to them. These men were from Galilee. They knew the family of Jesus. They thought what Jesus was saying was preposterous.

Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me, unless the Father Who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

. Their basic problem was their relationship to the Father. They cannot understand Who Jesus is and where He came from until they listen to God Who calls them.

Those who have been drawn by God to Christ will come to Him. Once again the promise is given; those who come will be resurrected on judgment day.

It is written in the Prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

The Prophets are those books of the Old Testament written by the prophets. This particular quotation is a loose rendering of the statements found in Isaiah 54:13 and Jeremiah 31:34. There the learners are those whose hearts have been transformed by God and they love to do His will. If they love the Father, they will understand and trust in His Incarnation.

Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One Who is from God; He has seen the Father.

John has been choosing to record those incidents in the life of Christ that fit the pattern he is following from the history given of the world and the Israelites in the Old Testament. The great event that it seems John has seen this discussion to reflect is the next after the giving of Manna in the desert. It is the giving of the Law of God at Mt. Sinai. There God descended upon the mountain top in a thick cloud, in fiery glory with thundering and peals of lightning and He spoke

His commandments to the people—the will of God that must be obeyed if they were to avoid sin. They were terrified and begged Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.”⁸

However, when Moses was absent for forty days receiving the Law for the people, their terror did not restrain them from breaking the laws God had given them verbally. They made a golden calf and started to worship it.

Moses interceded for the people and God consented to meet with Moses “face to face just as a man speaks with his friend.” If this verbiage was taken to mean that Moses had seen the Father during those meetings, Jesus was quick to correct that misunderstanding. Moses had not seen the Father, neither had any man, except the one who had come from God. A greater than Moses was in their midst.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.”

“Truly, truly” usually precedes a very serious statement of our Lord that *must* be believed. They must believe (believe with trust) that Jesus has been sent from God to do His will for their salvation. The one who does so has (note: not “will have”, but “has”) eternal life. This life begins in time on earth the moment a person believes in Christ and the life goes on forever.

APPLICATION

Our reading for today is the last lesson we will have from the Gospel of St. John for this liturgical year that ends August 31. John’s purpose for writing his Gospel was “that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, we might have life in His Name.”⁹ Writing for those who know the Old Testament well, John shows us that Jesus is the same loving Creator, the Provider of all that man needs and the great Healer described in those holy pages. In our lesson, Jesus tells us what God’s will is. Will it be done?

“Ish-allah!” How many times have you heard it? Or perhaps it was “God willing,” or “If it’s God’s will.” The expression voices a certain idea that God’s will must and will be done in *all* matters. But is this true?

It is not God’s will that any one should perish eternally¹⁰, but do they? It is God’s will that all should believe Him and trust Him¹¹. Does everyone? God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.¹² Does this happen?

The Scriptures record that God pleads with mankind:

“Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked, rather than he should turn from his ways and live?” “Repent and turn away from

⁸ Exodus 19-20:22.

⁹ John 20:31.

¹⁰ John 3:16

¹¹ Ibid; 2 Peter 3:9

¹² 1 Timothy 2:4

all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel: For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the LORD God, “Therefore repent and live.”¹³

Does this mean that our God is not powerful enough to ensure His will? Most certainly He is powerful enough; but He has chosen to give man the right to choose Him or to reject Him. He pleads with us to repent; He does not force us to do so. We can choose death, although that choice is not His will for us.

In our lesson, Jesus lays out the will of God in His own case. It is to secure the eternal life of all those who have turned to God. As the perfect man, Jesus always chose to do the will of His Father in heaven. Jesus chose to submit every moment every action, and every word to the direction of His Father. As a man He exercised His right to choose and He chose God’s will. Securing eternal life for all those who turn to God meant Jesus must die on the Cross for the sins of the entire world. For, those under the penalty of sin were doomed to die. In taking that penalty upon Himself, He freed all those who belong to God through their belief and trust in Him. Thus He secured their eternal life. Jesus did the will of God. The purpose of God was completely fulfilled in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Further, it is God’s will that all those that belong to Him should be resurrected. Because those who trust in the work of their Savior on the Cross are no longer counted as sinners but instead are counted as righteous, their resurrection is known as the ‘resurrection of the righteous.’¹⁴

This resurrection is also known as the ‘first resurrection’ and will precede by a thousand years the second resurrection (the second resurrection is the resurrection for judgment of all those who reject God.) We are told in the book of Revelation that “blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death¹⁵ has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.¹⁶ This is the will of God that Jesus has been commissioned to ensure for His own. Our Lord Jesus Christ, because He is God, has the power and He chooses to use it for all those who put their trust in Him. We can rest assured that just as He secured our salvation, He will also resurrect the righteous just as God has willed.

Since it is the general will of God for us to freely choose to return to Him in repentance, in belief and in trust, this should be our first concern. After we have done this and have become His child, God offers us more. Just as God had a specific will for His incarnation,

¹³ Ezekiel 18:30-32

¹⁴ Luke 14:14; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:4, 5.

¹⁵ The first death is physical death; the second death is eternal spiritual death.

¹⁶ This “thousand years” is the last period of time on this present earth before it is destroyed. Later, after the final judgment, God will create another heaven and earth where He will dwell eternally with His people. See Revelation 20-22.

Jesus Christ, He also has a specific will for each of our lives. Like Our Lord's, it involves God's plan to save as many as are willing to come to Him in love and trust.

There are many parts to be played in God's Plan of Salvation, particularly in making it known to others. If we obediently commit our wills to His, Our Father will show us how we can best serve Him in His plan. He will lead us in the path that best prepares us for that service. This may involve a great many things including our family connections, our education, our place of employment and even our place of residence. If we submit to God's will, He will guide our thinking through the study of His Holy Word. He will open the door of opportunities, endow us with the power to do our part, and give us peace about our decisions.

It is a privilege and an honor to serve our God, but the honor only goes to those who out of grateful love for Him choose to do His will. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, chose to do His Father's will; He chose to die on the Cross to ensure our salvation, our eternal life and our blessed resurrection to His Presence forevermore. He asks us to believe it and trust in Him and then to follow His example and do whatever God shows us to be His will. May God help us to do all that He asks and praise Him for giving us that glorious opportunity.