

“The Will of God: Three Things” (1st Thessalonians 5:16-18)

For Your Life in Christ the Third Sunday in Advent

December 11th, 2011

Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

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Introduction: Knowing the Will of God and Preparing for Christ’s Coming

- A. Too often finding the will of God in relation to the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has turned into a “predictive prophecy” project. Where God’s Word is treated wrongly and the clear words of Jesus are ignored.
- B. Matthew 24:36: ***“But concerning that day and hour no one knows...”*** [Christ speaking in respect to the Last Day]
- C. And yet, William Miller predicted 1843, Hal Lindsey predicted 1988, Harold Camping predicted May and then October of 2011 (this year), and Tim LaHaye has said on or before 2024 (“before the end of the first quarter of the 21st century”).
- D. Now let’s get back to the point here: though these are extreme examples, our tendency is to get ahead of ourselves, become transfixed with the future and have our smaller versions of “predictive prophecy.”
 - 1. Where will I be in 5 or 10 years?
 - 2. What will happen to my health?
 - 3. What graduate school will I attend?
 - 4. Where will my marriage and family be?
- E. Certainly we want to build strong foundations and go into the future as good stewards of God, ***but the preoccupation with the future has turned “finding the will of God” into a very complicated and anxiety-ridden project. Consider what Jesus said:***

Matthew 6:33-34: ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”***

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- F. The good news is that God doesn’t expect us to get all bent out of shape when it comes to “knowing His will” and trying to peer into the future! ***His will for us, it is much simpler (praise Him!), it is much more focused on what really counts.***
- G. The Christians in Thessalonica had some major issues:
 - 1. They were so in tune to the imminent coming of Jesus Christ that they were worried about what would happen to their loved ones in respect to the last day. What about them? What about those loved ones in Christ? How would they be included in the coming of the Lord?
 - 2. The second issue was much more practical: because they were so transfixed on the future, they were “checking out” of today, they were losing their focus on their immediate call and vocations; they were forsaking their responsibilities and they were letting go of their daily duties. So St. Paul wrote 1st Thessalonians to fix their course again.

Part I: So Let’s Major in Majors When it Comes to the Will of God

- A. What does God ***really*** want you to do? Now I know if you’re a Raider fan like I am, this will be hard to believe: But God doesn’t care about whether you root for the Oakland Raiders or the Green Bay Packers today; He doesn’t care about where you have lunch (though at Saint Paul’s we always recommend Ruby’s!); and He isn’t worried about your next big business move. He has more fundamental things on His mind when it comes to His will for you. ***And when we focus on what is really His will, then everything else has a way of panning out!***
- B. He calmed the Thessalonians by revealing the simplicity of His will. First He gave them what is recorded in chapter 4:3-4:
1st Thessalonians 4:3-4: ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.”***

- C. Pretty straight forward huh? This isn’t some deep, mysterious

esoteric revelation of God's will that you need to climb a mountain somewhere, but it's about your new life in Christ as God's new creation (2nd Corinthians 5:17); it's about living out the impact of Christ living for you; shedding His blood to wash away your sins; and rising from death to give you a new life.

Part 2: And Just When You Thought It Couldn't Get Simpler!

- A. The Lord then gives us three little basic things that flow from our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. And here my dear brothers and sisters in Christ ***is the will of God for your life! [the Greek has no definite article, so this includes God's will, but is not exhaustive of it]***

1st Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

- C. The first little thing is "rejoice always." This must be one of those places in the Bible where critics want to say that the Bible contradicts itself. What do I mean? Well, didn't Jesus teach in the Beatitudes – Matthew 5:4 – ***"blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."***? Well of course He did. This, however, is not a contradiction but an explanation:
 - 1. The constant joy of the Christian is not "natural joy" that comes from the good change in circumstances. That kind of joy is when the game show host says, "You've won a new car!" and the music comes on and the winner starts to jump up and down. I had this reaction for about 5 seconds Thursday night when I heard that Chris Paul was joining the Los Angeles Lakers and then that very same "natural joy" was stolen away in a flash when the NBA blocked the deal about an hour later. Oh well!
 - 2. This Christian joy, this "supernatural" or faith-oriented joy is different. It is the joy that flows from faith in Christ. It is the joy that applies faith to all circumstances and says:
 - a. The Lord is with me and will not forsake me.
 - b. And no matter how much difficulty my circumstances

cause me, do you know what? God has made a promise to me: He is going to work things out for my good! Guaranteed! God says, "You know how you can be sure?" Think of Christ who says, "I love you this much!" [pastor will spread out his arms to remind us of His cross which saved us]

- c. This is a different joy. It is a confidence that God is blessing us even through adversity. Look at the example of Saint Paul:

Acts 16:25: "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God."

- d. ***Do you remember the context here? Paul had just been attacked, had his clothes torn off, had been beaten with rods, was thrown into prison, and had stocks put on his feet! Now please go back and read Acts 16:25 one more time! [repeat Acts 16:25]***

- D. The second little thing is exactly what we've been reading about: "pray without ceasing."
 - 1. This one gets all kinds of bad press. Even Christians read this and say, "OK, God is just being unrealistic here! How can we pray 'without ceasing'?"! Hold on a minute! The word here is *prosklisis* and it does not mean in -- this instance -- formal prayers.
 - 2. ***It means "a leaning towards," it is a constant consciousness that you need God! It is a constant awareness that the Lord is with you and loves you. This prayer is indeed "without ceasing." This kind of faith is God's will for you!***
- E. The third little thing is "give thanks in all circumstances." It is directly related to everything we've already said. This thanksgiving epitomizes faith in Jesus Christ. You develop the eyes of faith. Notice how vs. 18 ends ***"in Christ Jesus"...well, to be "in Christ" means truly that whatever you face and yes, sometimes it's really bad stuff...but whatever it is, He leads you! With sins forgiven, rejoice, pray, and give thanks!***