

I came across a cartoon this week which showed a man running from a bank after having robbed it. On one side was an angel and on the other the devil. The caption read: "I wish you two would tell me when you change sides."

I have a little tongue in cheek book entitled, Games Christians Play. One chapter is about how to rephrase certain incidents in your life. For example, you don't say that you were kicked out of school because you partied more than you studied. You say, "God has chosen a different path for me."

Some of the things in life are not God's will but our stubbornness, stupidity, etc. The prayer that Jesus taught is important because it touches on these areas of living- our will or God's will.

As the prayer continues, Jesus taught, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Abram was asked to leave home and embark on a journey with God at the age of 75. This went against all the accepted traditions and norms of his day. These would have required him to stay home with his father and then when his father died take over the family. This was what would have been expected. But, God called Abram and had him leave all of that which was secure and familiar. He begins a journey that will be filled with ups and downs. He had not gone far in his journey when he enters Egypt (12:14). Abram realized the beauty of Sarai and he knows that Pharaoh will want her. He rationalizes that in order to get her the Pharaoh will have him killed. So, the solution - let's not trust God but let's lie. She agrees and they tell Pharaoh that Sarai is his sister. When Pharaoh discovers the lie he gives Sarai back and sends Abram on his way. They will try it again later in the story - he doesn't seem to learn very well.

Did Abram not trust God to keep the promise of his call on Abram? The promise, "*I will make you into a great nation*" and, "*Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them*". Then he said to him, "*So shall your offspring be*" (Gen. 15:5). Rather than trust, Abram lied.

We could bemoan this cycle throughout Israel's history, "If they had only listened." (If we would only listen!). My image is when we get something that needs to be assembled and we tackle it not looking at the directions first. We keep forging ahead until we get into trouble and then we head back to the directions. God gives directions. Adam and Eve had paradise. They lived in a perfect world and walked in the garden each evening with God. There was only one simple direction - don't eat of the fruit of one tree. Everything else is yours to enjoy. They couldn't get it right and since then we have not followed directions well. Israel's heritage is to get in trouble, call on God to answer - God comes and answers and they promise to be good and then in a few years the cycle is repeated.

As Solomon dedicates the Temple in II Chronicles we hear God say, "*If my people...*" (7:14). If my people follow my directions and keep to my path. I will bless them. It is because we couldn't follow directions that Christ came.

Jesus is God's will. He did not come on his own - but because God was willing to rescue creation Jesus came. Jesus came being obedient to the very will of God. Paul puts it this way, "*...he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross*" (Phil. 2:8). The cross became a stumbling block for God's own people. Rescue us yes, but not the whole world. They couldn't understand a love that reaches to the whole world.

Yet, Jesus was doing the very will of God. John 9:4b says, “*We must do the world of the one who sent me.*” (KJV “*I must*”) - (“We” is a better translation). The Living Bible says, “All of us...” It is plural, like the prayer Jesus taught - we are called to do the will of God. To follow after Jesus.

What did Jesus do? He fed the hungry, clothed the naked, healed the sick, sought God’s justice for the world and opened the doors of the kingdom to anyone who would come. Luke 4:18 gives us Jesus’ perspective of his calling, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*” This is the will of God. This is what we pray for when we pray that God’s will be one on earth as it is in heaven. We pray for earth to be a reflection of heaven. Heaven may be far more open than we want to admit.

On the other side, what is not God’s will? Putting it simply, anything that does not embody love for the world. John summed up God in three words, “**God is love**” (I John 4:8). Read again I John and its emphasis on our love for God and our love for the world. If God is love than we must be love.

God’s will may or may not be the outcome of an election. Remember the disciples choose Matthias to replace Judas but God may have had another in mind - one who was not even in the running - Paul. One who had never been with Jesus and one whose early life was committed to getting rid of any who might be a follower of the Way. We need to be careful when we proclaim things to be God’s will: the Crusades, the Inquisition, Aids, etc.

Dorothy Sayers comments on what she calls God’s three great humiliations.

1. The Incarnation, God becoming human
2. The Cross - God dying for the world
3. The Church - when it does not follow God’s path of love.

Philip Yancey points out that one of the slave ships was named, “The Good Ship Jesus”. Today, we have Standing Rock, one among many places where the stewardship of the earth is being called into question. I am sure that if it was running through a golf course the results would be different!

Jesus said, when you pray, pray, “*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” - Nietzsche said, “His disciples will have to look more saved if I am to believe in their Savior.” Jesus said, “*For God loved the world...*”

Do we know what we are praying when we prayer, “Your will be done...”

May God’s love be always found in us.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988