

Beginnings: Isaac gets engaged! Genesis 24 - May 22nd 2016

We have been making our way through Genesis, the book of "Beginnings" and we have had a pretty good journey so far. We have been talking about finding our story in God's story. We have been talking about transformation. As we read the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, Noah, Abraham and today Isaac, we see lives caught up in God's story and we have seen how their lives have Manifest God's continuing story. God's story did not end with the end of the Bible. As we listen, believe and obey, God's story continues in you and me and in 4Cs. But that is the secret isn't it listening - believing - obeying . . . It makes me ask a question . . .

What is the will of God for my life?

What do you think; is it God's will for me to break this 2 x 4 over my knee?
Yes? No? How many think I would be an idiot to try? Pretty good consensus on that option.

Let me just say that the will of God is perhaps as big a subject as you can preach on and that we can only barely get started in such a conversation. But just because it is deep and wide doesn't mean we should avoid the conversation in fact. It is the fact that we as Christian are concerned about the will of God that in large part separates us from the rest of humanity. John Piper, a preacher I particularly like said;

The family resemblance of all the people of God is not the perfect performance of God's will, but the persistent purpose to do it.

John Piper, Knowing God's Will

The Word of God is the Will of God

God doesn't want to frustrate us in seeking His will for our lives. As it says in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." We can see that finding God's will for our lives is found in the Bible. His words to us are His Word in print - the Bible. You will be amazed at how much of God's will for your life will be plainly revealed to you by simply reading the Bible every day. God is not trying to hide His will for your life. That is not His way. He wants you to know His will and the will of God is in the words of God - in Scripture.

Remember the passage on the Tower of Babel in Chapter 11 and how intricately it was crafted with complex alliteration and the frequent use of homonyms and the chiasmic rhythm and cadence that would have made it easy to memorize? This account isn't like that at all. This is more like a first person history account, almost a blog. It is an easy story to read, and we don't have lots of motivation to look for deep meanings and secret wisdom. Still let's what it offers as we let our mind's settle on the will of God . . .

Isaac is an interesting fellow. Here we read of the account where Abraham, Isaac's father, secures a bride for his only son. You remember that it was Isaac that Abraham was commanded to sacrifice on Mt Moriah (Genesis 22). Later Isaac would have twins, Jacob and Esau. And as we will see in our continuing studies of Genesis, it is this son Jacob (aka Israel) that becomes the father of the 12 sons who would then become the tribes of Israel (we tend to think of Israel as geography but really it is a family - the family of Jacob/Israel).

This account, all found in chapter 24, is the longest single story in all of Genesis, so by its girth alone we can expect that it will have importance. Let's see if we can figure it out . . .

Genesis 24:1-9

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, 3 that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the

earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, 4 but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." 5 The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?"

6 Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. 7 The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. 8 But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

It goes on to reveal the cultural habits of engagement rituals 2000 years before Christ, the loyalty of Abraham's servant is displayed, the greed of her brother is revealed and the Christ-like character of Rebekah shines like a beacon. And of course eventually, Rebekah leaves her home and travels fearlessly with this nameless servant to become Isaac's bride (When they first met, Isaac saw camels and Rebekah saw Isaac, take that for what it is worth . . .)

So what is Abraham's mind here and how can we connect this little story to the sweeping doctrine of the will of God? In this story we see the evidence of Abraham's clear knowledge of the will of God by his three strong statements . . .

Isaac Must Have a Wife

Isaac's Wife Must Not Be Taken from the Canaanites Isaac Must Not Return to the City of Nahor

The Two Wills of God

1. God's Will of Decree, or Sovereign Will
2. God's Will of Command

God's Will of Decree, or Sovereign Will

Let's start with God's Will of Decree or Sovereign Will. This is the idea referred to so often in scripture that indicates God's will as the final or most ultimate reason for anything that happens. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (1:11) refers to God as the one "who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will"

The Greek is Ta Panta - all things mean exactly that - all things created on heaven and on earth "Who accomplishes" - a present participle meaning continuing. . . "Who continually brings about all things. . . "

Let's see the passages of Scripture that make us think this way. First consider passages that describe "the will of God" as his sovereign control of all that comes to pass. One of the clearest is the way Jesus spoke of the will of God in Gethsemane when he was praying. He said, in Matthew 26:39, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." What does the will of God refer to in this verse? It refers to the sovereign plan of God that will happen in the coming hours. You recall how Acts 4:27-28 says this: "Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." So the "will of God" was that Jesus die. This was his plan, his decree. There was no changing it, and Jesus bowed and said, "Here's my request, but you do what is best to do." That's the sovereign will of God.

That's the first meaning of the will of God: It is God's sovereign control of all things. We will call this his "sovereign will" or his "will of decree." It cannot be broken. It always comes to pass.

2. God's Will of Command

Now the other meaning for "the will of God" in the Bible is what we can call his "will of command." His will is what he commands us to do. This is the will of God we can disobey and fail to do. The will of decree we do whether we believe in it or not. The will of command we can fail to do. For example, Jesus said, "Not

everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Not all do the will of his Father. He says so. "Not everyone will enter the kingdom of heaven." Why? Because not all do the will of God. Let me try to give you some examples; for instance it is God's command - among many other things -that you be saved, that you be spirit-filled, that you be sanctified and that you suffer

Saved, Spirit-filled, Sanctified, Suffer

Let's look at each of these ideas in order as examples of the will of Command of God

1 Timothy 2:3-4

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

In one sense, God can truly want all who have ever lived to be saved; however, this desire always defers to His will to glorify Himself. The will in view when the Bible says His will is always done. It is His will that all be saved, but the reality is that not everyone who calls Lord, Lord is indeed saved. We can choose to disobey His will of Command.

Let's look at another example, not only does God will of Command desire us to be saved, among those who believe he will that we be spirit filled and led by the spirit into lives that give God glory and honor and reflect his character. That happens when we are spirit-filled and not filled with substitute or false spirits. Look at this passage from Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:17-20

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These commands of will that he desires for us that we can disobey are often called his Moral Will. God desires that we act according to His character and according to the Rules of His Kingdom. That teaching is beautifully summarized in Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 in the Sermon on the Mount. It is filled with commands of His will, and we can disobey them. Not without consequence of course, but we can.

That brings us to the next idea, the idea of being sanctified. This is a pretty big word that theologians use. For us regular folks, it means to be made pure and holy, to act righteous and according to the character of Christ. Sanctified . . .

1 Thessalonians 4:3a

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,

God has promised that he will complete the good work he began in you to conform you to the image of His Son. We can either give in to the process and embrace and obey His intentions for our sanctification - or we can walk the other way and fight His will for our lives. If we are truly in Christ, this would never be our heart attitude. When we find ourselves walking the wrong way - we are to repent, that is to make our mind to turn from these habits and action that hurt us, that hurts the ones we love and hurts our relationship with God. And God will use all things to complete the transformation of our hearts toward Him, even suffering;

1 Peter 4:19

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

It is the will of God that you suffer, because our suffering has its purpose.

James, the brother of Jesus tells us; (James 1:2-4)

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[Back to the 2 x 4 idea]

I don't think it matters, but I'm not going to try. Cuz I'm not an idiot. When it comes to understanding the will of God - we need to start here. We don't need to worry about the Sovereign will of God - it will be accomplished and we can celebrate that and glorify our Father in Heaven for his faithfulness to His word. In fact we can have perfect peace if our minds are set on the God of Promise!

And there is more than enough right here (the Bible) to worry about without letting our lives get all wrapped around the axil on this.

The Word of God is the will of God.

Christian: Become Who You Are!

It is the will of God that you remember that you are secure in Him, that you are significant in Him. These are the promises of God, and just as Abraham based his understanding of the will of God for his life as based on the promises of God, we know that that when everything in this world lets you down, He will not.

Your job is to go and live into that reality. You have been made new. You are a new creature. You are no longer held hostage by the power of sin in your lives. You have been set free. The same power that raised Christ from the dead lives in you in the person of the Holy Spirit and it is the will of the Father that you live into this reality! Even if it doesn't feel like it right this second. In fact even more so when it doesn't feel like it! That is the time to claim the power and to rebuke the Devil. He will flee from you. Because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. Believe that Christian? It is time to live according to the truth and the promises of God. To trust and obey. Let's become who we are by living boldly obedient lives according to the commands of our God who longs for us to know Him and love Him. Amen

Discussion Question:

When you think of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, what comes to your mind; great 'men of faith' or men with 'feet of clay'? How so?

Dave spoke about the will of God in worship this past Sunday. How often do you think about the will of God in your lives? What were the circumstances of one of the times when you really felt compelled to act according to what you felt was the will of God in your life?

Dave spoke of the General or Sovereign Will of God as "The final or most ultimate reason for anything that happens." This is the will of God that happens according to the "Council of His (the Godhead's) will. What kind of things fall under the heading of the Sovereign will of God?

Dave also spoke of the Will of Command, also sometimes called the Moral Will of God. These are commands or imperatives that we can wither obey or not. What kinds of things fall under the authority of God's will for our lives that are like this?

Dave mentioned four; to be saved, to be spirit-filled, to be sanctified, and to suffer. What do you think of these desires or intentions of God? How can we participate in the will of God in these matters?

What about God's will that we be generous, that we love our neighbor, that we are prepared to give a defense of our faith, that we are to be honest and kind and other-centered? How can we keep all of that in mind every day? Isn't that asking too much of us?

What one thing are you praying about concerning the specific will of God for your life right now? Can this Community Life group partner in prayer with these important decisions?