

- I. Not My Will But Yours; Sunday, July 13, 2014
(Sunnyslope)

Psalm 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be
pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

- A. "Good morning, church!"
- B. Starting in the early afternoon on Friday, July 4th
this year, I flew my family on a week-long "air
trip" across 2 mountain ranges and 3 states
1. It was simultaneously fantastic, amazing, and
exhausting
 - a) Our original intent was to make it to
Great Falls, Montana
 - b) But due to some very strong gusting
winds, we diverted and eventually made it
all the way to Kalispell, Montana instead
 2. Quite contrary to our expectations and our
plan, we found ourselves in Sandpoint, Idaho
Sunday morning
 - a) So we decided to visit the Sandpoint
Church of God
 - b) Which was a wonderful church to visit
 - c) I had not meet the pastor before
 - d) So it was great to meet Jon Pomeroy and
his wife Cathleen for the first time
 3. Now, Sandpoint the town itself is an
absolutely beautiful place
 - a) I had driven through Sandpoint half a
dozen times or more over the years
 - b) But I had never stopped and walked around
 - c) Nor looked at the sights
 - d) Nor listened to the local people

4. What struck me was how different the mindset of the people are to here
 - a) What I mean by that are the priorities
 - b) The focus
 - c) And what ultimately distills down to the culture of the region
5. Here in Western Washington, we are as a society almost post-religious
 - a) The majority of folks don't attend church
 - b) And a non-trivial percentage of the population does not demonstrate any real belief in God
6. By contrast, when you get over to Pullman, Moscow, Spokane, and Sandpoint areas, you start to see a whole lot more overt Christianity
 - a) There are a lot more signs up
 - (1) Not so much signs about churches...
 - (2) ...but signs signifying a Christian influence on what would otherwise be secular activities
 - b) There's greater church attendance
 - c) There are more church camps
 - d) And there are many subtle ways the culture's leanings toward God manifest

C. Different cultures have different priorities

1. What's important to someone who lives here is different than what's important to someone who lives in Sandpoint
 - a) What we concern ourselves with what someone in Sandpoint concerns him or herself about are often different

- b) Therefore, what we pray to God often times ends up being different
 - c) But often, our prayers to God are mutually exclusive
 - d) Meaning, we can't all get what we ask for
2. As an example, imagine a very tall mountain
- a) The winds are fairly constant, flowing in one direction across the mountain
 - (1) And moisture is blown with the wind
 - (2) This causes one side of the mountain to be fairly rainy
 - (3) Whereas the other side is fairly dry
 - b) On each side of the mountain, there's a farm
 - (1) One farmer prays for more rain because his land is dry
 - (2) The other farmer prays for more sun because his land is too wet
 - c) To which farmer does God listen? And to which farmer does God not listen?
- D. Today is the World Cup finale match (in a game we here call "soccer")
- 1. It's a game between two teams from two different countries
 - 2. And certainly folks from each of these two countries will be praying for their team to win
 - 3. But there's an interesting bit of trivia about today's match
 - a) You see, we have 2 Catholic Popes alive today (not a common occurrence)

- b) One is from Germany; the other Argentina
 - c) And in the World Cup match, there are two teams: One is from Germany; the other Argentina
 - 4. Now imagine that both Popes pray to God, and both ask God to favor their team in the match this afternoon
 - 5. Both teams can't win
 - 6. So which Pope's prayers are more effective?
- II. These sorts of mutually exclusive situations tend to lead us toward a couple of false beliefs
 - A. I've heard these false beliefs talked about commonly
 - 1. And I'd like to demonstrate how they are false
 - 2. The first of the 2 false beliefs is in about how God answers prayers
 - a) It's simply stated: "God answers prayers with either yes, no, or wait."
 - b) It's a cute saying, but it's entirely wrong; it's counter-indicated by Scripture
 - 3. The second of the 2 false beliefs relates to who is offering up prayer
 - a) It's the belief that some are "closer to God" than others
 - b) And therefore their prayers will be more effective
 - c) It's the false belief that a pastor is somehow going to get God's attention whereas a parishioner won't

- d) It's a false belief that gives us a license to avoid direct prayer with God, thinking that perhaps we should have so-called "prayer warrior" do our praying for us
- e) This too is counter-indicated by Scripture

B. So let's look at Scripture to determine the truth

C. The truth is that if we ask anything in faith and in accordance with God's will, it will be given

1. But the 2 key points there are "in faith" and "in accordance with God's will"
2. In other words, we need to believe
3. And we need to ensure that we are asking for things that are in furtherance of God's will, His perfect plan for all the universe
4. Let's look at some specific Scripture

Mark 11:24

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

1 John 5:14

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

John 14:14

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Matthew 7:7

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Matthew 21:22

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

5. That's a rather compelling bit of evidence that the popular myth that God answers yes, no, or wait is false

- D. Now let's look at the notion that pastors are somehow more effective at praying (and therefore should do all the praying for us)
1. It turns out, I couldn't find a single verse in Scripture that indicates that pastors are "closer to God" or will have their prayers answered more readily
 2. There are many verses that talk about how we need to all be striving to be closer to God
 3. But it has nothing to do with our job titles
 4. The way for God to be closer to us is to draw ourselves closer to God, and to do so by submitting our will under His will

James 4:8

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

5. The truth is that we need to pray for wisdom (which will always be granted), which is to understand God's will, then submit to His will

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

James 4:7

Submit yourselves, then, to God.

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

- E. We are called to submit our wills to God and to pray to God always in faith

1. Then why is it then that we persist the myth that a pastor's prayers will work better than our own and that God might just answer no or wait to our petitions?
2. Is it perhaps because we have prayed in the past and those past petitions were not granted?
3. Could it be that maybe, just maybe when we prayed these prayers in the past we were asking for our own desires, our own wills to be fulfilled?

III. I wonder if perhaps when we pray, we sometimes come to God with a solution already in mind, then we earnestly pray for that specific solution to come about

- A. Instead of praying for wisdom (which is to come to understand God's solution)...
- B. ...we have an outcome already in mind, and we pray to God that our desired outcome takes place
- C. Sometimes I wonder if we doubt God a little
 1. Pastors fall into this trap all the time when it comes to church growth
 - a) We use human understanding to conclude that the only way for our church to grow is for us to throw out old traditions and to embrace new, exciting, trendy things
 - b) So we go to God and ask God to bless our new, exciting, trendy things
 2. I see well-meaning but misguided Christians doing something similar all the time
 - a) They focus on one ministry or one aspect of service or one particular way to do something...
 - b) ...and then conclude this must be what should happen...

- c) ...and then pray to God that this one thing take place
 - d) ...but fail to realize God may have something much greater in mind
3. I see folks who are struggling with various different stumbles in their lives
- a) Some don't pray at all
 - (1) Thinking perhaps they are not worthy to ask God for help
 - (2) Or perhaps thinking they shouldn't bother God
 - b) Some do pray, but they pray for a specific outcome
 - (1) They might pray: "God, please cause this outcome to happen"
 - (2) But instead, though, they should be praying for God's wisdom and the capacity to submit to God's will
 - (3) They fail to realize God may have something much greater in mind
- D. We have, of course, the perfect example of placing God's will above all other things; and that perfect example comes from Jesus Christ
- 1. When Christ prayed to God on the Mount of Olives, He desired that the suffering He would go through would not take place
 - 2. He even went so far as to ask that the suffering not land upon Him
 - 3. But He prayed this only if it was in God's will

Luke 22:42

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.

4. When we pray, and we should pray every day, may we imitate the perfect example of Christ
5. May we pray: "God, if you are willing; yet not my will, but yours be done."
6. Amen