Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

It can be the case that we know words without knowing what they actually mean. For example, one tradition associated with New Year’s Eve is to sing the Scottish song, ‘**Auld Lang Syne**.’ And the chorus goes, For auld lang syne, my jo, For auld lang syne. We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet, For auld lang syne. And even a bunch of drunk people will happily sing along at a New Year’s party. But what does Auld Lang Syne actually mean? Well, literally, it means ‘old long since,’ meaning, essentially, the olden days or past events that we remember with happiness.

And for some of us, knowing words but not really understanding what they mean might also be true in relation to this phrase in the Lord’s Prayer – “*Your will be done*.” Why do I say this? Well, **Matthew 10:29** says, “*[Not one sparrow can] fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father*.” And **Ephesians 1:11** praises God “*who works all things according to the counsel of His will*.” So, if God works all things according to His will, we might think that this part of the Lord’s Prayer is just us saying, Do what you will, O God. But why the reference to “*on earth as it is in heaven*”? For surely it is not harder for God to do what He wills on earth than it is in heaven? So, what exactly do we mean when we pray: “*Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*”?

Well, when we pray this part of the Lord’s Prayer, **we believers ask God for the gift of complete obedience to His will**. And this involves three things: That He might help us **reject our own will**, that He might help us **trust His will**, and that He might help us **obey His will**. Let’s look at each of these things.

1. Firstly, we believers are asking God to help us **reject our own will**.
   1. In **John 4:34**, Jesus said, “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work*.” And so, in the same way that we need food to stay alive, Jesus needed to obey the commandments or the will of His Father in heaven. So, for Him, obedience was not something optional or occasional, it was always, quick, complete, and joyful. And Jesus said to us in **John 14:15**, “*If you love me, you will obey my commandments*.” And as we read earlier in **Psalm 19**, “*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul … the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes … the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether … Moreover … in keeping them there is great reward*.” **1 John 5:3** says, “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome*.” So, the commandments of God, or the will of God, is good and is for our good. And I trust I will not get any argument on that truth from any of us. And negatively, as we also read earlier in **Matthew 7:21**, 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*.” And in **James 1:22-25**, we read, “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For … the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty … being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing*.” And the clear implication of these words is that if we hear the word and do not do it, then we can only expect judgment. **1 John 2:4** says similar: “*Whoever says "I know God" but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him*.” So, disobeying the commands of God is not good and is not for our good.
   2. This is all perfectly clear then. **But, oh how hard it is to do! Right?** And surely, this is our number one struggle, each day, as believers, isn’t it – to choose to do or think or say what is in accord with God’s will. Or, to put it the other way, to choose not to do what *we* want to do or think or say, which, very often, is contrary to God’s will.
      1. **Every** **parent** **here will know the struggle of trying to raise children to do what they have been told**. You tell them what to do, so that they don’t hurt themselves, so that you can all get out the door on time, so that there will be peace instead of war, so that they do not catch diseases, so that you and they will be happy, etc. And then you watch them do the exact opposite of what you instructed them to do.
      2. Well, with due respect and reverence, welcome to God’s world. (Extend hand and offer) He gives us His law, which is good and is for our good, (roll up hand and push away) and He watches us, each day, perhaps many times, go, no thanks!
      3. And this is the most fundamental struggle of the Christian life: God gets to make the rules and we don’t like it!

* 1. So, when we pray, “*Your will be done*,” with sincerity, we are praying against ourselves. We are praying, Lord, please *bend* my will, *subdue* my will, *give me a healthy distrust* of my will, help me to see that my will *does not bring true happiness*, help me to see that *I am weak and prone to sin*, help me to see that my will is *opposed to you and your glory*, help me to remember that pursuing my will *is spiritually dangerous, for myself and others*.

* 1. Now, as everyone here who has prayed this prayer, with sincerity, knows well, sooner or later, we choose our own will and sin again. And this is where the Apostle Paul helps us, wonderfully. For in **Romans 7** he laments his inability to obey God’s commandments. He says, “*I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing!*” And then he cries out, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” And where does he go in his turmoil? To the cross! “*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” And we are talking here about **justification**. Ultimately, our standing in God’s eyes depends not on our obedience, but on the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. So, our prayers of confession should include our choice to do our own will, instead of our Father’s. But we must rest in Christ, each day.
  2. But listen also to the benediction of **1 Thessalonians 5:23**: “*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely*.” And here we are talking about **sanctification**. We will not be without sin until we are with the Lord. But He has given us the Holy Spirit that we might grow in holiness. And to grow in holiness is to become more and more like Jesus. And as we saw earlier, for Jesus, obeying His Father’s will was like eating food to survive. So, when we pray this prayer, we must desire the help of the Spirit to make us more and more like Jesus. We must want Him to give us a greater willingness and power to resist our will and to obey our Father’s will. And then we must make good use of the means that He uses to sanctify us – such as the preaching of the Word, participating in the Lord’s Supper and meditating on our baptism, personal Bible reading and prayer, and fellowship with other believers.

1. Now, our second point is like the other side of the coin to our first point. You see, we will only make progress in rejecting our own will, as we grow in trusting our Father’s will. And that is why with this request we are also asking our Fatherto help us **to trust His will**.
   1. Now, when it comes to our Father’s will, it has two parts: One part we call His **will of decree**. It is what is in view in the verse I quoted near the beginning of the sermon: Ephesians 1:11, which praises God “*who works all things according to the counsel of His will*.” And this has to do with His sovereign power and majesty over all creation, and includes, also, His plan of salvation. And nothing can or will prevent His will of decree from coming to pass. But it is not that part of His will that is in view in our prayer. That part is His **will of desire**. And by this we mean the commands of the Bible whereby God reveals His will or desire for our lives. And this is best summed up by the summary of the law that the Lord Jesus gave us: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'*” This is what the Lord desires of His people.
   2. And for us to want to obey this aspect of His will, we must trust that His law is good and for our good. Earlier I quoted **Psalm 19**: “*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul … the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes*.” **Psalm 119** says similar: “*How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! … Your testimonies are wonderful … I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments*.” And negatively, “*My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law … My zeal consumes me, because my foes forget your words*.”
      1. And let us not just skip over these words as a kind of unobtainable-super-spiritual-but-not-realistic sentiment. These were King David’s sincere beliefs and feelings and desires, despite his sinfulness. He yearned for a greater obedience in Himself and the people of Israel. And he literally cried over disobedience to God’s law. And this should be our attitude too.
      2. In his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, Kevin De Young puts it like this:

*Who will weep for needless divorces, aborted babies, rebellious teens, selfish fathers, and spiteful mothers? Who will put away the pounding fist, the cowardly tolerance, and the cynic's laugh and instead shed streams of tears because sexual deviants, greedy loan sharks, duplicitous politicians, phony Christians, and prideful pastors do not keep the law of God? The will of God alone is good and we distrust it to our shame and our hurt.*

* 1. Now, underlying our attitude toward the law of God is **our attitude toward our Father in heaven**. For the fact is that we may not understand all His laws. And we may not understand, in the moment, how obeying them is better than how disobeying them might feel.
     1. But perhaps you can remember a time when you had a choice to either do something or not. And the person who told you what to do was not there to give advice in the moment. And what seemed clear when the instructions were given was not nearly as clear in the moment. And in that situation, it typically comes down to trust, doesn’t it. If you trust that person, (hopefully) you will go with what they said.
     2. And so, underpinning everything that David said about the law of God was his trust *in God*. Why is God’s law Good? Because God is good. Why is His law trustworthy? Because He is trustworthy. **Psalm 119:137**, “*Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules*.”
     3. I’ve told you before about **Rachel Gilson**. She had received Christ, but, as a lesbian, although she could clearly see that God forbade same-sex activity, she couldn’t understand why? Who got hurt? How could love be wrong? And they are the exact questions that so many ask today. Now, she did eventually come to understand the why of this command. But at the end of the day, what decided it for her back then was trusting in God. If God is good, then His law is good and is for my good, even if I do not understand why and it seems hard to do.
  2. And what all this brings into focus is this question: Do you believe that God is your Father in heaven through faith in Christ? Do you believe that He is good, and that His law is good, and for your good? If so, when you pray, “*Your will be done*,” you are asking Him to help you trust His will. You are saying, Father, make your words “*sweeter than honey to my mouth [and] help me to see that in keeping your commandments there is great reward*.”

1. And that brings us to third and last part of what we are asking for with this request, which is that He would also help us **to obey His will**.
   1. One of the portions of Psalm 119 in our songbook begins like this: “How I love Thy law, O Lord! Daily joy its truths afford. Sweeter are your words to me that all other good can be.” And you know what? The people of Israel probably sung those words just before they were taken into exile for continued idolatry, immorality, and injustice. And the Pharisees of Jesus’ day loved singing those words, too. In fact, if you had asked them what made them the people of God, they would have replied, we have His law. And they spent hours memorizing it. But in **Matthew 23:27-28**, Jesus said to them: “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*.” And it can be like this with us too, can’t it. We hear the law, in here, and we talk the law, out there, but all that counts for nothing if we are not committed to obeying the law.
   2. And this is where the rest of our text helps us: “*Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*.” For what that last phrase has in view is **the obedience of the angels** in heaven. You see, when God gives them a command, their response is instant, complete, joyful, every time. But unlike them, the old Andre or the old you is neither willing nor able to carry out God’s commands, instantly, completely, and joyfully. And only God, by His Spirit, can *make* us willing and able. And that is why we must pray this prayer. For only with God’s help can we say, as David did, “*My soul keeps your testimonies; I love them exceedingly*.”
   3. Now, perhaps you have wondered, as I have, **why God doesn’t just zap us with a full infusion of His will**? Madge Weatherall had her appendix removed this week. Now, they didn’t replace it with something else. But why doesn’t God give us a will transplant? Just take our will out and put His will in? Why this agonizingly slow process of learning to reject our will and trust His will? Well, the answer is that He does not want His will in us as much as He wants our will to reflect His.
      1. Again, returning to **the analogy of parenting**, when children are young, you can compel them to obey. You can impose your will on them, such that will do what you tell them do. And this is a necessary and legitimate part of parenting in the younger years. But as they grow older, and their own will gets bolder, that no longer works. So, surely every wise parent’s aim is to address the word of God to their children’s hearts, and to pray that the Holy Spirit might fill their children’s hearts, such that their children will desire, themselves, to do what is right, because it is right, because it pleases you, but most importantly, because it pleases the Lord. In other words, their will matches your and the Lord’s desires for them.
      2. And that is what the Lord seeks from you: He wants you to learn to love what He loves, to want what He wants, and to hate what He hates. He wants every sermon and Bible study and circumstance that you encounter to draw you to Him and His will with a deeper trust and eagerness to obey.

And its messy, brothers and sisters! It requires struggle against sin and the fight of faith. And it only comes when we have our eyes fixed, firmly, on Jesus, “*who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*.” So, let us be ever thankful that our salvation depends not on our obedience, but on the obedience and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And let us keep praying this prayer, with sincerity: “*Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*.” Amen.