Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In **Matthew 7**, Jesus said, “*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*” And **Philippians 4:6** says similar: “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication … let your requests be made known to God*.” So, we are commanded to pray to God for good things, indeed, for everything. So, we may pray, for example, for a better job, for healing for ourselves or a loved one, for a house with more space for the family, for an end to some sort of personal or church conflict, for a much-longed for baby, for someone to marry, for good grades at school, for rescue from persecution, for some piece of legislation to go through or not go through, or for a specific outcome to a problem we are wrestling with, etc. There are a great many life things and situations that we may ask our Father for.

The problem though is that what we think is good or needed, may not be good or needed. Perhaps you have the story about the man who had one son. And they owned a horse that they loaned out to the villagers for their income. Well, one day the horse broke out of its enclosure. So, the villagers came around to console the man about this bad thing. And the man said, “How do you know it is bad? It might be good.” And the next day, the horse, which was a stallion, came back, bringing with it a mare. So, the villagers came round to rejoice in this good fortune. But the man said, “How do you know it is good? It might be bad.” And later that day, as the son tried to ride the mare, it threw him off and he broke his leg. So, the villagers came round again to say how sorry they were about this accident. And the man said, “How do you know it is bad? It might be good.” And the next day, the army recruiting officer came through the town to round up all the fit young men for military service. But they did not take the man’s son because of his broken leg. And the story could just keep going, couldn’t it. What seems bad to us, in the moment, may have what we would call a happy ending. And what seems good to us, in the moment, may turn sour later or have bad consequences.

But more importantly than this, we simply cannot know what best serves the glory and honour of the Lord, and His purposes in and through us. And this is where our text helps us. The **context** is that the Lord Jesus was about to be betrayed and arrested. He would be abandoned by His closest friends. He would then endure an entirely unjust and unlawful trial. He would be beaten and mocked and spat on. He would have the crown of thorns placed on His head and be stripped naked. He would then have to carry His own cross, until someone was forced to carry it for Him. He would then have nails driven though His hands and feet to the wood of the cross. He would then endure the three hours of the holy wrath of His Father, against each and every sin that you and I and all God’s chosen ones have committed. So, what lay ahead of Him at this moment was unimaginable physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual agony. And from His study of Scripture, He knew that all this awaited Him. And none of us would describe any of it as good. None of us would want to go through that. And you know what? THE LORD JESUS DID NOT WANT TO GO THROUGH IT! And we know this because of His prayer: “*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me*.” In other words, Father, I do not want to go through this if there is another way. Please, *please*, let there be another way. But that is not where His prayer ended, is it. For He also said, “*Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will*.” Or, in other words: “Your will be done.” And with these words, our Saviour taught us to trust in the will of our Father in heaven. Or to put it another way: **When we pray “*Your will be done*” we are trusting that however God responds to what we ask for, He knows best what is for our good and His glory**. So, three brief points for us to consider together, which we will then tie together with some ‘so what?” thoughts.

1. The first point is **the PROMISE in Scripture that helps us to endure adversity**. And we find this promise in **Romans 8:28**: “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good*.”
   1. Do you love God? When you think about Him, is there, in your heart, love for Him as your Father in heaven? You know He is real, you know He sent His son to die on the cross for you, and you know that He is watching over you. Well, if you do love God, then for you, “*all things work together for good*.” You cannot lose! Whatever happens, ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ works together for good.
      1. Now, this does not mean that you will always be healthy, wealthy, and happy. Earlier in the service, we read **Psalm 73**. And as I said, in that Psalm the Psalmist begins by complaining that unbelievers seem to breeze through life while believers have it tough. He was even envious of them. He felt that all his efforts to obey God’s commands were a waste of time. But then he went to the temple. In other words, he closed his physical eyes and opened the eyes of faith. He had the Lord as his God, and, more importantly, the Lord had him! He had an eternal inheritance to look forward to. He had the wisdom and truth and understanding that only those whose eyes have been opened to the Bible as the Word of God have. He knew that whatever circumstances he faced were for his good, and that his soul and eternal destiny were secure, through union with Christ. And I like to picture the Psalmist going from confused complaining to comforted confidence!
      2. In the part of the Heidelberg Catechism that explains providence, or God’s sovereign care for His creation, it says that He upholds all things “and rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty – all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from His fatherly hand.” And we each then confess that “I trust Him so much that I do not doubt that He will provide whatever I need for body and soul.” But listen also to this next bit: “and He will turn to my good whatever adversity He sends me in this sad world.”
      3. And this is where we will focus our attention today. You see, when we get the answer to our prayers that we think is good, well, that is easy. But what about when we do not get what we think is good? What about when the Lord sends us adversity? For that is typically when we find it hardest to trust our Father in heaven.
      4. For now though, let this promise of Scripture underlie our trust in God; let it be what we preach to ourselves, especially in times of adversity: “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good*.”
2. And as our second point, let’s consider **three EXAMPLES from Scripture of good coming from adversity**.
   1. The first one is **the Lord Jesus, in our text**. For what happened to Him was *utterly* evil. And we need to be clear about that. When we say that God works all things together for good, that does not make adversity good; it just means that good can come out of adversity. But Jesus trusted in the will of His Father in heaven. And did good come out of the crucifixion and death of the Lord Jesus? Well, I hope you can quickly answer, Absolutely! Through faith in Jesus, we receive the forgiveness of sins, adoption, the Holy Spirit, wisdom, holiness, understanding, and eternal life! But what about for the Lord Jesus, Himself? Did good follow evil for Him? And again, I hope you can quickly answer, Absolutely! Philippians 2:9-11 says, “*God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*.” So, He was resurrected and exalted, and by His death, we are saved. And in this way, good came out of adversity. So, we see that our Father in heaven deserves our trust.
   2. Our second example is **Joseph** in Egypt. His brothers were jealous of him. At first they were going to kill him but then they sold him into slavery in Egypt. And they lied to their father about what they had done. Was any of that good? No. It was utterly wicked. And Joseph became a slave. He was then falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife and thrown into prison for some years. Was any of that good? No. It was horrendous adversity. And if we had been able to visit Joseph in prison, we would have sympathized with him over his awful circumstances. But do you remember what Joseph said to his brothers when he met them again many years later? We read it in Genesis 50:20: “*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*.” God eventually raised Joseph up to number two in the land and he prevented many deaths by preparing Egypt for a famine. But none of it would have happened if his brothers had not done what they did. And in this way, good followed adversity. So, we see that our Father in heaven deserves our trust.
   3. Our third example is **the Apostle Paul**. In 2 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul begged the Lord, three times, to remove a thorn from his flesh. We don’t know exactly what he was referring to, but Paul thought that having the ‘thorn’ removed was for the best. And one thing is for sure, whatever the ‘thorn’ was, it was a result of living in a fallen and sin-cursed creation. For there will be no thorns, of any sort, in the new heavens and new earth. So, it was perfectly OK for Paul to ask that this ‘thorn’ be removed. But the Lord did not remove the thorn. Paul’s good and God’s glory were revealed best by the thorn remaining. And so, His answer to Paul was: “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*.” And Paul rejoiced in that answer. He said, “*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong*.”
3. And I want to jump straight into our third point, here, which is where we find **INSTRUCTION in Scripture about God’s purpose in sending adversity**.
   1. You see, with our Apostle Paul example, he does not identify some specific good outcomes for himself or for others. It seems that the good in view with him is what the Lord taught him, or what the Lord accomplished within Paul. And this is where we return to **Romans 8, but this time to verse 29**. For having promised that for those who love Him He works all things together for good, we are then told the ultimate purpose of God’s providential dealings with us: “*For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son*.” So, our Father works all things together for good, including adversity, so that we might become more and more like the Lord Jesus. And congregation, the best thing is to become more and more like the Lord Jesus. Or to put it negatively, the one thing that the devil does not want is for you to become more and more like the Lord Jesus.
      1. **Hebrews 5:7-9** speaks of the moment described in our text in this way: “*In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered*.” Now, there is a whole sermon in that passage :-) But Jesus learned obedience through what He suffered.
      2. We see a similar truth in relation to us in **Hebrews 12**. Let’s turn there together (p. 1009): “*And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*.”
   2. Can you see where all that we have learned is heading? When our Catechism says that our Father in heaven will turn to our good whatever adversity He sends us in this sad world, that might mean a good outcome for ourselves or others, like we saw with Joseph. But it might also mean that we learn obedience, like the Lord Jesus did, or that we learn to be content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities, that magnify the strength and grace of God in and through us, like Paul did.
      1. When **Martin Luther** commented on this part of the Lord’s Prayer, he said that we are saying to our Father, “Give us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering, and adversity and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will.” And Luther went on to say that if we do not have this level of trust in the will of our Father in heaven, then we will try and take God’s place and, for example, seek revenge on those who have harmed us. He said, we will be protected "from the horrible vices of character assassination, slander, backbiting... condemning others" only if we learn to commit ourselves to God. If we can't say "thy will be done" from the bottom of our hearts, we will never know any peace. We will feel compelled to try to control people and control our environment and make things the way we believe they ought to be. Yet to control life like this is beyond our abilities, and we will just dash ourselves upon the rocks.
      2. And this is why **John Calvin** added that to pray "your will be done" is to submit not only our wills to God but even our feelings, so that we do not become despondent, bitter, and hardened by the things that befall us.

Brothers and Sisters, young people and boys and girls, I am certain that if I went round the room, every single one of us would have one or more heartache adversities that are top of our prayer lists. And we are praying, over and over, Father, please heal … Please, do this … Please, do not let this happen … And they are all good things to ask of our Father. He *commands* us to ask them of Him. But we must also pray, “Your will be done.” And we must do so understanding what we are asking for. We have His promise: “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good*.” We have examples in Scripture – The Lord Jesus Himself, Joseph, and the Apostle Paul. And we have His purpose for all things that He sends our way, including adversity – that we might become more and more like the Lord Jesus. For the fact is that we each have a will that needs to be crucified, in order for us to become more and more like the Lord Jesus. And we have feelings that are so prone to sinful expressions.

One of my favourite verses in all scripture is **Psalm 30:5**: It says of God, “*For His anger is but for a moment, and His favour is for a lifetime. Weeping may remain for the night, but joy comes in the morning*.” Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is your Father in heaven. This is how He lovingly deals with us. This is why He is deserving of our trust. May each one of us *know* this, *believe* this, and *experience* this. Amen.