

Sermon Text for August 16, 2020

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Genesis 2:8-15, Matthew 6:9-13

“On earth as it is in heaven”

Last week we said that the phrase that we were covering would be the most difficult phrase. Thy will be done, and we covered it by saying that it is such a difficult part of the Lord's Prayer because it is so difficult to understand what God's will for our lives as individuals, and I would say even for the church might be. Then on Thursday night I kind of went a bit deeper in our Bible Study and I kind of said something a bit different. Over the course of my ministry I have preached on prayer, I have done Bible Studies on prayer, I have conducted seminars for Presbyteries on prayer and in those settings I have said something along the lines of: one of the primary goals of prayer is to understand what the will of God is in our lives. I remember as a young 30 something leading a seminar on prayer where I said if we spend enough time in prayer then we should never find ourselves unsure of what to pray. Our relationship with God should be such that we know what God's will is because we have put the time into discerning God's will for our lives in prayer.

Two senior pastors after the seminar came up to me and asked me, do you really believe that? Do you really believe that we can understand the will of God at all times. I referred them to passages of Scripture where we never see Jesus or anyone else for that matter pray in a way that was vague and that showed that they did not know or didn't find out what God wanted them to do in that certain situation. So to begin today I wanted to clarify from last week that while the phrase Thy Will be done might be the most difficult because it is very difficult to discern the will of God, I do want to add that it is possible to discern the will of God if we spend the time and do the work of praying in order to strengthen our relationship with God. So thank you Thursday evening Bible Study for contributing to this sermon this morning.

So, if last week was the most difficult, this week is the least addressed of the topics in the Lord's prayer. Very few commentaries say anything about this phrase at all. Most of them take it to be a defining phrase for what came earlier, Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be done, here, on earth, just as it is in heaven. A descriptive term that really doesn't carry any weight by itself. But we did say that this prayer as a whole can be transformative for our lives which means that it is not reserved simply for the by and by. This prayer is not to prepare us for heaven in a way that here on earth we are of no earthly good. God expects us, absolutely, to lay up treasures in heaven, but God also expects that what we do here on earth is practice for what it will be like in

heaven. We can't expect just to turn it on once we get to heaven while we were real curmudgeons here on earth.

Today we are going to see that what happens here on earth has to be shaped and fashioned after what is expected of us in heaven. And now, especially in these times of crisis, our energies tend to go into staking out what we feel like we need on earth when Jesus always tells us to look to heaven and use that as a guide. Let's read.

READ SCRIPTURE

A preacher once asked his congregation: "Will all those who are going to heaven please stand up." Everyone stood up except for one man who sat quietly in the second pew. The preacher asked him, "Aren't you going to heaven?" The man answered, "sure I am, but I thought you were getting a group to go right now." There has always been a tension in our lives between the now and the not yet. As a family we watched the movie Harriett Tubman last night and you could see how every single step of her journey and every single step of her life she waited and listened for the voice of God who would speak to her and guide her here on this earth.

Genesis tells us very clearly in the verses that we read, actually it tells us twice, verses 8 and 15, that God placed us here on this earth, in this Scripture it was in the garden. In vs. 8 and there he put the man whom he formed. Verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden...God formed us and put us here on earth in order to work and in order to care for God's creation and in order to care for each other. There is no mention of us caring for ourselves, God will take care of that, but rather there has always been the sense that our primary responsibility is to care for that which God has created around us.

But we have always, as Christians, had one foot on earth and one foot in heaven and sometimes we have erred on the side of thinking heaven is all that we have to live for. This prayer tells us differently. When we read about the garden of Eden in Genesis we catch glimpse of heaven on earth. We see a relationship with God where, as the old hymn states, and he walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own, and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.

We catch a glimpse of heaven as we live out our Christian faith here in the church. I have always said that what we do here in the church on Sunday is practice for what happens the rest of the week. What we learn here and what we do here has to influence and mold us to the point that heaven is brought down to earth through us. In Jesus we are able to catch a glimpse of heaven on earth and we are able to live our lives in such a way that God's kingdom and God's will are both able to be done through our actions and through our emphasis.

Dwight L. Moody was asked by a man, “Preacher, can I chew tobacco in heaven?” Moody answered, “sure, you can, but you have to go to hell to spit.” There is a sense that we don’t have to wait in order to see heaven but rather it can be in the here and now. Heaven should be impacting earth, and not vice versa. What happens in our lives and what happens in this church should be influenced by what God is doing in paradise. We know what that looks like: Look at Revelation 21:2-4. But the reality is that a person recently diagnosed with cancer isn’t experiencing this reality right now. Clark Taylor and Cynthia and Scott are not experiencing that right now as Mary is struggling to hold on.

The reality of earth often presses upon what we are able to imagine will be because what is, simply is not even close to what will be. In the Greek the phrase in Matthew that we read: on earth as it is in heaven, is actually reversed. As it is in heaven, so should it be on earth. The same is true in Italian. Come in cielo, cosi` in terra. Even while we face that which would never take place in heaven, what we face here on earth and how we interact with the realities here on earth must emanate from an understanding that in Jesus the kingdom of God has come, that we can understand what heaven is like, we can understand what it was like for Adam in the garden of Eden and take our cues from that.

Mark Twain when asked about heaven and hell said: “I don’t like to commit myself on the subjects of heaven and hell – I have friends in both places.” Jesus ate with the sinners and the tax collectors. He did not shy away from getting dirty with earth and with its inhabitants. He was not so focused on the kingdom that was to come that he disregarded the kingdom that he was establishing on this earth here and now. Our earth in which we live reflects that tension which heaven embraces.

But how do we experience this heaven on earth which Jesus ushered in and promised could be and should be a part of the life that we live. It seems like our current reality is less Garden of Eden and more like the garden that I plant and inevitably spins out of control. What we must realize is that the gate of heaven is everywhere in Jesus Christ. God is opening the door to us not only to invite us in, but to work through us to bring heaven on earth. But we say that we don’t see God at work. We say that we find ourselves at wits end with all that is happening around us. Where is Jesus when we find ourselves in this time and in this place? Where is He not?

Our role is not insignificant in creating a culture and creating a reality in which people are able not just to experience Jesus but to participate in a life which reflects the heaven that God wants to take place here on earth. I am excited for the start and the continuation of professional

sports. There is something about sports that fascinates me especially where there is a change in coach or some other change and the first thing that people say is that their desire is to change the culture of the organization. We have tried to bring about a culture here at FPC that is clear and unique. A culture where everyone is welcome. The culture of the church means something. Going to a church where there is a good culture means something, you can feel it in the air.

The culture that we have tried to create here puts others ahead of whatever selfish desires we might have as an organization. Instead of circling our wagons in times of crisis we do the opposite. We stretch out our arms to see how wide they can stretch and who they can encompass into a culture of heaven on earth. God placed us on this earth to work hard, to till the ground, to feel the dirt, to recognize that what we do here, matters. We are called to be a city on a hill, salt of earth, a light in the darkness.

We will make it through this time and when we do the first question I will ask of us is how did we do? How did we do in maintaining a culture of open arms and welcome in a time that people are forced to be by themselves and socially distance which inevitably works against that culture. How did we do in bringing heaven to earth when earth is trying so desperately hard to separate us and keep heaven 6 feet away.

As we pray this prayer we asking for both God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done just like in heaven, so here on earth. Yes, we are to lay up our treasures in heaven, but those treasures should be on full display here on this earth. Amen.