

Sermon Series: “Teach us to pray”—Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Westfield, IN—2/17/2002

Title: “Pray for God’s Will”

Text: James 4: 13-15 & 1 John 5: 13-15

Introduction: *Ills.: The Bear and the Atheist*

Theme: Prayer is not some magic rabbits foot to getting God to do something for us; rather it is activity born in relationship to God through Jesus which seeks to brightest and the best solution which comes from God’s perfect will for me and others.

The dangers of planning and praying outside of God’s will (PRINT AND READ JAMES 4: 13-15)

- It demonstrates spiritual arrogance (vs. 13)
 1. “*Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"? Isaiah 29: 16*
- It is living in denial of reality (vs. 14)
 1. The reality of our sin-fallen world is that we are here today and gone tomorrow and so are our plans
 2. **Ills.: Dust in the wind (Kansas)**
 3. When we forget, our prayers/Christianity become self-centered and we blame God for unanswered prayers
- It misses out on divine blessing (vs. 15)
 1. “If the Lord wills” is more than a restriction—it is actually encouraging us to allow God to lead and remove the obstacles, shortfalls, and snares to our plans
 2. **Ills.: Part of God’s plan**

Knowing God’s “general will” to apply our prayers specifically

- Our salvation
 1. **Is a relationship with Jesus (*my forgiveness, faith, bodily resurrection, eternal life*) the foundation of how and what I plan, future decisions I make, choices I select about a spouse, a career, an education?**
 2. “*This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*” 1 Tim. 2:3-4
- Our holy conduct
 1. “*It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.*” 1 Thes. 4:3
 2. Asking the question about my plans: ***Will it lead me closer to the Lord or farther from Him?***
- Our future with a plan and a hope
 1. “*‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’*” Jeremiah 29: 11
 2. God has plans set before our birth for a future, a hope, and his glory—***Do we plan with that perspective?***
 3. “*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” 1 Thes. 5:23
 4. God’s ultimate plan for us is to get us home to heaven—***how do we own that in our planning?***

Biblical Principles for praying and staying within God’s will (PRINT AND READ 1 JOHN 5: 13-15)

- Come in prayer with the confidence of the name of Jesus Christ (vs. 13)
 1. Naming Jesus’ name somewhere in your prayer is not a requirement but a statement of faith and comfort
 2. “*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God . . . Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*” Hebrews 4:14-16
- Ask for God’s will to be done in you rather than you bending God’s will to accomplish yours (vs. 14)
 1. Instead of praying about something/someone, pray “*for*” them
 2. Instead of praying for the short term, ask *for God’s perspective* on the long term
 3. Instead of praying for “revenge,” instead *intercede* for mercy and grace
- Expect and look for God’s will to be done and ask for the discernment to know when it is happening (vs. 15)
 1. **Ills.: Confusing Signs**
 2. “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*” Romans 12:2

The Bear and the Atheist

An atheist was walking through the woods, admiring all the "accidents" that evolution had created. "What majestic trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!" he said to himself.

As he was walking alongside the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. Turning to look, he saw a 7-foot grizzly bear charge towards him. He ran away as fast as he could up the path. He looked over his shoulder and saw the grizzly was closing. Somehow he ran even faster, so scared that tears came to his eyes. He looked again, and the bear was even closer. His heart was pounding, and he tried to run faster. He tripped and fell to the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up, but the bear was right over him, reaching for him with its left paw and raising its right paw to strike him.

At that instant the atheist cried, "**Oh my God!**" Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest was silent. Even the river stopped moving. As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky, "*You deny my existence for all these years, teach others that I don't exist, and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?*"

The atheist looked directly into the light and said, "***I would feel like a hypocrite to become a Christian after all these years, but perhaps you could make the bear a Christian?***" "Very well," said the voice.

The light went out. The river ran. The sounds of the forest resumed. Then the bear dropped his right paw, brought both paws together, bowed its head, and spoke: "Lord, for this food which I am about to receive, I am truly thankful."

Part of God's Plan

I have a sign in the mirror of my room I see it every morning in my groggy condition, when I first wake up: **WHAT HAVE YOU GOT GOING TODAY, GOD? I'D LIKE TO BE A PART OF IT. THANKS FOR LOVING ME.** I have to find my place in God's plans, rather than make my own little plans and then ask God to support them: "Come on, God, give me an A in this course. Come on, God, do this for me." Instead, I pray, "What have you got going today, God? You love this world. You loved this world into life. You created this world. We're all yours. What's my part in the drama? What part do you want me to play? I will play any part you say. Want me to be a success? I'll be a success for you. Want me to be a failure? I'll fail for you. Whatever you want." That's the condition of successful prayer. *Citation: John Powell, "Prayer as Surrender"*

Confusing Signs

Doug Lansky has been a travel writer and photographer for many years. In the course of his travels he has collected photos of odd signs from around the world. Some samples:

A white highway sign in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, says, "Entrance Only / Do Not Enter."

A yellow diamond-shaped sign from Mill Valley, California, says, "Not a Through Street." Right below it is a blue circle with a white arrow pointing straight ahead and the words, "Evacuation Route."

A sign in Pennsylvania says, "Invisible Fence Now Open."

A sign from Rome, Georgia, says, "Used Rainbows, \$250 and Up."

And finally, a blue sign with white letters reads: "Pakistan-Narcotics Control Board Investigating Unit." But it is obscured a bit by the marijuana growing up in front of it.

James 4:13-15

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." [NIV]

1 John 5:13-15

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him. [NIV]