

**'Not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me', John 6. 38. Bethesda Meditation. 10 August 2008.**

**Hymn :**

O Lord! We would the path retrace  
Which Thou on earth hast trod —  
To man Thy wondrous love and grace,  
Thy faithfulness to God.

Faithful amidst unfaithfulness,  
'Midst darkness only light,  
Thou didst Thy Father's name confess,  
And in His will delight.

*J. G. Deck*

**Reading : John 6. 38**

The words of our Lord Jesus, *'I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me'*.<sup>1</sup>

We have just sung, 'Thou didst Thy Father's name confess, *and in His will delight*'. And this morning I want to consider briefly how, from the moment our Lord left heaven until the moment He laid down His life on the cross, He chose to do God's will and not His own.

When Mr. J. G. Deck, who wrote our opening hymn, penned the words 'and in His will *delight*', he undoubtedly had his eye on verses 6 to 8 of Psalm 40; which reads, 'Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require. Then I said, Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. *I delight to do your will, O my God*'. And there can be no doubt but that these are the words of our Lord Jesus – spoken prophetically some 1,000 years before their fulfilment. For the writer to the Hebrews says concerning the Old Testament animal sacrifices, 'It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Therefore', the writer continues, 'entering the world, He (our Lord Jesus) said, Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me ... Then *I* said, Behold, I have come, in the scroll of the book it is written of *me*, to do your will, O God'.<sup>2</sup>

Note those words, '*entering the world*', and remember the words of Jesus we read from John 6, 'I have *come down from heaven*, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me'. It was therefore, as I said just now, 'from the moment our Lord left heaven' that 'He chose to do God's will and not His own'.

So it is not surprising to find that the Saviour's very first recorded words when in the world – as recorded by Luke in chapter two of his gospel – words spoken by Jesus, at the age of twelve, to His mother in the Temple court at Jerusalem ... that His very first recorded words were 'Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?', Luke 2. 49 – literally 'that I must be in the things of my Father' – occupied, that is, with His affairs.<sup>3</sup>

Our Lord spoke of His Father's will several times in John's gospel chapters 4 to 6; first as His 'food' ... then as His 'goal' and 'desire' ... and finally as the very 'purpose' for which He had left heaven.<sup>4</sup>

Speaking metaphorically of course, He told His disciples in chapter 4 that God's will was *His food*.

We read in verses 33 and 34 that, when the disciples queried, 'Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?', Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work'. And so, having spoken earlier to the Samaritan woman about water which she could never draw from the well at Sychar, Jesus spoke to His disciples about food which they could never buy in the city of Sychar. He had drawn His nourishment and satisfaction from a higher source – that of performing His Father's will by ministering spiritual help to the needy Samaritan woman.<sup>5</sup>

But His Father's will was not only His *food*. It was, He told the Jews of Jerusalem in chapter 5, *His goal and His object in life*.

Having spoken to them of His God-given right to judge all men, He asserted, 'As I hear (hear from God, that is), I judge; and my judgment is righteous (is fair and just)', He said, 'because I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me'.<sup>6</sup> No assessment or judgement which our Lord pronounced was ever warped or tainted by self-interest or any personal considerations. For every judgement He pronounced He had first heard passed by the Father, and His perfect submission to His Father's will was therefore the guarantee of the fairness and equity of His judgement.<sup>7</sup>

But His Father's will was not only His *delight*, His *food* and His *goal*. It was, He informed the Jews of Galilee in chapter 6, *the very purpose for which He had left heaven*.

Just before, He had told them, 'You have seen me and yet do not believe'.<sup>8</sup> Did this mean that His ministry and mission were to prove fruitless and to fail? Far from it, for He immediately added, 'All that the Father gives me will come to me (will reach me, will arrive with me)<sup>9</sup>, and the one coming to me (the one on the way to me<sup>10</sup>) I will by no means cast out'.<sup>11</sup> And then He gave the reason why He could never reject those who came : 'For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.<sup>12</sup> And *this*', He added, 'is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day'.<sup>13</sup>

The very fact that He had come to carry out God's will ruled out the possibility that He could ever discard any who the Father had given Him for safekeeping.<sup>14</sup> Here lay the absolute guarantee of their eternal security – and ours!

I said at the outset that our Lord 'chose to do God's will and not His own' 'from the moment He left heaven *until the moment He laid down His life on the cross*'. And so He did. We have already thought of the words of our Lord Jesus when 'entering the world' – as quoted by the writer to the Hebrews – 'I have come ... to do your will, O God', but I note that the writer added, 'And *by that will* we have been sanctified through *the offering* of the body of Jesus Christ once for all'.<sup>15</sup>

But it would be unthinkable for us to bypass the Garden of Gethsemane, where our Lord anticipated His horrifying suffering of the coming day.

Matthew tells us that 'He ... fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I<sup>16</sup> will, but as you will'.<sup>17</sup> 'Then', Matthew says, 'He came to the disciples ... Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup cannot pass away from me unless I drink it, your will be done'.<sup>18</sup>

The olive trees of Gethsemane knew Him well. John tells us in his gospel that our Lord '*often* assembled there with His disciples', John 18. 2. But those gnarled, twisted trees had never heard such prayers as these before ... nor would they ever again.

Earlier in his gospel, Matthew had informed us that Jesus used the very same words '*your will be done*' on a previous occasion – when teaching His disciples how to pray; 'After this manner pray', He had said, 'Our Father in heaven ... *Your will be done* on earth as it is in heaven'. Oh yes, the One who had 'come down *from heaven*' to do His Father's will knew well how perfectly that 'will' was done '*in heaven*'. But He also knew that the fulfilling of that 'will' – by Him or by any other – on earth or in heaven – had *never* proved so costly as it would that day. And yet, knowing all, our glorious Lord aligned Himself with the Father's will: 'Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will'.<sup>19</sup>

And we often – and rightly – contrast *our Lord's submission* to God's will in Gethsemane with *the first man's rejection* of God's will in another garden. And we have good authority for doing so. The apostle Paul drew out the contrast clearly towards the close of chapter 5 of his letter to the Romans: 'As through one man's offence judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous'.<sup>20</sup>

Adam said to God in effect, 'Not what you will, but what I will', and proceeded to ratify his decision at a tree – that of the knowledge of good and evil – with devastating consequences, not only for himself but for all linked with him (for the entire human race) – bringing condemnation and death to all. But our Lord Jesus reversed that decision, saying, 'Not what I will, but what you will' – and He also proceeded to ratify His decision at a tree – walking the path of obedience all the way to death, even death on a cross – thereby securing the most blessed consequences for all linked by faith with him – bringing justification and life to them all ... to *us* all! Praise His name!

**Hymn :**

By Thee, O God, invited, We look unto the Son, In whom Thy soul delighted, <b>Who all Thy will hath done;</b> And by the one chief treasure Thy bosom freely gave, Thine own pure love we measure, Thy willing mind to save.	The trembling sinner feareth God will not all forget; But one full payment clearth His memory of our debt. When nought beside could ease us, Or set our souls at large, Thy holy name, Lord Jesus, Secured a full discharge.
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Mrs. Mary Bowley Peters<sup>21</sup>

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> It was true that He was 'sent', but it was equally true that He 'came'.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. 10. 5-7.

<sup>3</sup> In passing, it is delightful to note that, although He was perfectly conscious of His unique relationship to His Father God, the story continues, 'He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them', Luke 2. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps His delight, His diet, His desire and His design?

<sup>5</sup> 'To listen to the Father's voice and to do His will were the joy and the strength of His life', F. F. Bruce. As a possible background to John 4. 35-38, the disciples may well have been 'discussing the time of year and the prospect of the harvest. They must wait four months before bread became cheaper ...', W. E. Vine.

<sup>6</sup> Compare verse 19; 'the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner'. Now it is 'as I *hear*, I judge'.

<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the judgement of the Jews which was perverted, distorted because they sought their own will.

<sup>8</sup> John 6. 36.

<sup>9</sup> The verb (ἤξει) means 'to arrive', 'to be present'. In the papyri it means "to come to", "to reach"...', TDNT, volume II, page 926.

<sup>10</sup> The present participle - ερχομενον.

<sup>11</sup> John 6. 37.

<sup>12</sup> It was true that He was 'sent', but it was equally true that He 'came'.

<sup>13</sup> John 6. 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> 'His having come from heaven to carry out the will of the Father in the eternal salvation of those who come to Him, rules out the possibility of His casting out one such', W. E. Vine.

<sup>15</sup> Heb. 10. 10. The words 'once for all' being emphatic by position.

<sup>16</sup> Emphatic.

<sup>17</sup> It is possible to see something of the 'Sin Offering' in the opening clause, and something of the 'Burnt Offering' in the second. 'Jesus bent to accept the chalice of suffering from which (He) could not but shrink', H. P. Liddon, 'The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', page 263.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 26. 39-42.

<sup>19</sup> Mark 14. 36. 'The Son's complete alignment with the Father's will', E. K. Barrett, *John*, on John 10. 17, page 313.

<sup>20</sup> Rom. 5. 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> See ... [http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/p/e/t/peters\\_mb.htm](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/p/e/t/peters_mb.htm)