**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-034. THY WILL BE DONE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."*

*Matthew 6:10*

It makes all the difference whether the thought of the name, or that of the will, of God be the prominent one. If men begin with the will, then their religion will be slavish, a dull, sullen resignation, or a painful, weary round of unwelcome duties and reluctant abstainings. The will of an unknown God will be in their thoughts a dark and tyrannous necessity, a mysterious, inscrutable force, which rules by virtue of being stronger, and demands only obedience. There is no more horrible conception of God than that which makes Him merely or mainly sovereign will.

But when we think first of God as desiring that His name should be known, and to that end mirroring Himself in all the great and beautiful, the ordered whole of creation, and energising through all the complexities of human affairs, and gathering the scattered syllables of His name into one full and articulate utterance in the Word of God, then our thoughts of His will become reverent and loving; we are sure that the will of the self-revealing God must be intelligible, we are sure that the will of the loving God must be good. Then our obedience becomes different, and instead of being slavish is filial; instead of being reluctant submission to a mightier force, is glad conformity to the fountain of love and goodness; instead of being sullen resignation, is trustful reliance; instead of being painful execution of unwelcome duties, is spontaneous expression in acts which are easy of the indwelling love. He who begins with Thy will be done is a slave, and never really does the will at all; he who begins with Our Father, hallowed, is a son, and obeys from the heart.

This, then, is one reason for the order in which the clauses of the prayer follow each other, perhaps the chief reason.

Let us consider--

* Obedience is here set forth as the end of all divine revelation.
* As the issue in man of all religious thought and emotion.
* As the sum of all Christ's and our desires for men.
* As the bond which unites all creation into one.

**I. Obedience to the will of God is the end of all divine revelation.**

God's name is made known before His will is proclaimed. That order suggests as to God's will--

**(a)** That it is not mere naked omnipotent authority.

**(b)** That it is not inscrutable.

**(c)** That its scope and direction are to be determined by His name. All these thoughts are included in this, that it is the will of a loving, good God, the will of a Father.

How that destroys all harsh, awful ideas such as those of a stony fate, or a cold necessity, or an omnipotent tyrant, or an inscrutable sovereign.

How Christianity has been affected by these ideas--extreme Calvinism, for instance; but it is more profitable to think how the tendency to them lies in us all.

**II. Obedience is the issue of all religion.**

The knowledge of the name, and the hallowing of it must go first. Note--

**(a)** How inward the nature of obedience is. This sequence of petitions shifts the centre from without to within, from actions to dispositions.

**(b)** How nothing is obedience that is not cheerful and loving. Not constrained, not sullen, not task-work.

**(c)** How naturally dominant over all life the principles of God's truth are. Let them be known, and all the rest will follow. They have power to control all acts, great and small.

**(d)** How impossible practical righteousness is without religion. The Name is the true basis of morality. We hear a great deal about life rather than creed; the Gospel is both. The one foundation of theoretical and practical morals is the will of God.

**(e)** How maimed and spurious is religion without practical obedience.

Religion in the form of thought and of emotion is intended to influence life.

The ultimate result of God's revelation of Himself and of God's kingdom among men is the conformity of our life and actions with the Will of God. That is the test of our religion. Character and conduct are all important. Here is a lesson for us all as to what the final issue of religious profession ought to be. Knowledge of God, true reverent thoughts of Him, submission in spirit to His kingdom--all these have for their final sphere the full sanctification of the nature and the free, spontaneous obedience of the life. We are all tempted to separate between our consciousness and emotions of a religious nature, and our daily life. Many a man is a good Christian in his heart, with real religious feeling, but when you get him into the field of the world he is full of sins. There must always be a disproportion in this world between convictions, resolutions, and actions; we imperfectly live out our principles; the force of gravity pulls down the arrow, and however true the bow and careful the aim and strong the hand, its course will be a curve, not a straight line.

Our machinery does not work in vacuo, and the force of friction and atmosphere opposes it and brings it to a standstill. This must be; but the discrepancy may be indefinitely lessened, and this prayer is a prophecy and kindles a hope.

**III. Obedience is the sum of all Christ's desires for the world.**

This is the last loftiest petition, beyond that there is nothing, for if our wills are conformed to God's, then we are perfect and blessed.

**(a)** The loftiest dignity of man is to obey. We have will: God has will. Ours is evidently meant to submit, His to rule. He only is what he ought to be whose whole soul bows to the divine command.

**(b)** The will submitted to God is free, strong, restful. He does not desire that it should be crushed or absorbed, but freely acting in obedience. That will is truly free which is delivered from bondage, and the burden of sin and evil. Submission to God strengthens the will. Sin overbears it, as we all know. Obedience braces and nerves it. Submission to God makes it restful. It is the conflict of self-will which troubles us. Peace is to will as God does; so He flows through us, and He is the living will that shall endure.

**(c)** The results of obedience will be perfect blessedness.

God's will is only for our good. His will for men and nations observed would change the face of the world.

Then this prayer includes everything that ardent lovers of their kind would desire.

How Christianity reforms from within, giving new life and letting that work on laws and institutions. Here is a lesson for all social reformers and for Christian men to see to it that they, for the world, try to spread the knowledge of His name, and for themselves, seek to be harmonised with His will.

But this petition sets forth an apparently unattainable example as our pattern of obedience. As in heaven, refers perhaps to the visible universe, which has always left on thoughtful minds the impression of beauty and order, and is the great revelation in nature of the omnipotent will of God. There clouds float on in peacefulness obeying Him, there stars burn and planets roll on their mighty revolutions. These all continue this day, according to Thine ordinance.

But that is by no means the exhaustive idea of this clause. We should not desire, were it possible, that men should be lowered to the level of the stars, doing a will which they know not, and swayed by a force which they have no eyes to discern. The obedience, the only true obedience, is that of spiritual beings who know God and can turn themselves to contemplate the will which rules their currents, as the sea looks up to the moon that sways its tides. So the reference is obviously to higher orders of beings, either higher by creation as angels, or higher because they have died, and are glorious saints before the Throne.

This petition, then, is a revelation as well. For the doing of God's will there must be spiritual beings, like ourselves. If our doing it like them is the highest last desire which He who came to do that will can form for us, and is the ultimate goal which, if reached, the world's history would be crowned, then these spiritual beings must do it perfectly. Their obedience must be complete. There can be no interruption to it from sin, no effort in it because of weakness, no resistance because of temptation, no flaw because of ignorance, no pause because of weariness, no pain because of rebellious will. Their obedience must be free, constant, spontaneous, happy. It must cover all their lives. Their whole being must be a sacrifice and service to the God whom they behold, and their life must be a life of activity. It is not the knowledge that floods the perfect spirits in heaven that is proposed for our example, nor their blessedness, but their service. So the thoughts of those who regard that heavenly existence only as idleness are corrected, and we are taught that, while we know little as to that future life, the conformity to the will of God, which in its present partial attainment is the secret of the purest blessedness, in its perfection will be the heaven of heaven.

Then again, there is here the grand idea that the whole creation will be bound into a unity by obedience to one will. We and they now form one whole, because now we serve the one Lord. And there comes a time when there shall be one Lord and His name one; when the omnipresent energy of His will in the physical universe shall be but a faint shadow of the universal dominion of His loving will in all His creatures. Then indeed it will be true, Thou doest according to Thy will in the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of earth.

What glorious harmonies will sound then, when all co-operate with God and with one another, and one purpose, and one will, and one love fills the whole creation!

The petition has a bearing of this upon the dreams of moralists and reformers. They were true, they shall be more than fulfilled. Earth will be no longer separated from heaven, but united with it, and from one extremity of creation to another will be no creature which does not obey and rejoice.