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Knowing and Doing the Will of the Father

Pete Burak

Hi, I'm Pete Burak. Let's begin with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus, we long to know You. We long to love You, and serve You, and be with You. Lord, send out Your Spirit upon us right now in this place. Fill our hearts with Your love, Lord Jesus. Lord, help us to hear Your voice, help us to hear what Your design is for our lives, what Your desire is for us. And then, Lord, give us the grace and the power to act, to do what You're asking us to do. Lord, help our hearts be firmly found, grounded, united to Yours. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Okay. So, this session is a tough one. This one is one that, when I got the verse that I wanted to be talking about in this time, I thought "This is hard. I'm not sure I like this." And then the more I prayed about it, the more I realized it's actually kind of simple. So it's going to start as a bit of challenge, and then hopefully it will end with a simple "Okay, I can do that. I can go from here." So, the verses that we're working with is Matthew Chapter 7, verses 21 through 23. Maybe one of the scariest verses in all of scripture. "***Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven.***" What? Okay, we'll get there. "***Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and do mighty works in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you evildoers!'***"

Hmm. "***Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven.***" That's a pretty strong statement. That's not as much a meek and mild Jesus, right. That's, especially when you combine that with when He says "***And I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you evildoers!'***" That's strong language. That's a bold, strong, confident leader, that sometimes isn't portrayed when we talk about Jesus. We like to talk about a lot of the softer spots of Him - "***Come to Me, all you who are heavy-burdened and labored, and I will give you rest***" - Right. And that's ultimately true as well. Jesus is our companion, our shepherd, our guide. But He's also our judge. He's also the one who came to reveal the way, the truth, and the life to what? To heaven. To salvation. To being part of His kingdom.

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And there are 2 kingdoms. And we, as human beings, have the choice between His kingdom, or the other kingdom: The kingdom of darkness. And those who choose that kingdom, those who do not listen to Him, those who do not believe in Him, those who do not follow the teachings that He gave us, those who don't know Him, run the risk and will be exiled from Him. He says it. ***"I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you evildoers!'"*** What's fascinating about that, there's a lot of things that are fascinating about this, but one of the things that is fascinating is He lists all of these things that we would consider to be, like, only what holy people do. He says ***"Did we not prophesy in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and do mighty works in Your name?"***

So here, we have these people who are doing things in the name of Jesus, things that we would consider to be, like, objectively good things - prophecy, casting out demons, yup, mighty works in the name of Jesus. And yet, at the end of the day, Jesus is saying "You did not know Me." How could they have done that and not know Him? Well, that's a bit of mystery, right. But I think part of the clue of what it means to know Him is in that first section: ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."***

Jesus says in the Gospel of John that the only thing He does is what the Father commands Him to do. He's obedient to the Father, so that the world may know the love that He has for the Father. Jesus came to reveal the Father to us, to create a pathway to being united with Him. And He is obedient to His Father not only because that's just kind of who He is, but because He is one with the Father, and Their wills are perfectly aligned. But He wants to demonstrate that our path to holiness, our path to salvation is obedience to the Father's will. Is obedience to the Father's will.

And what is the Father's will? That might be the linchpin of what we're talking about here. That might be part of the secret of how do we make sure that, at the end of our life, we do not hear "Depart from Me you evildoers," but instead hear "Well done, My good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." How do we avoid kind of that risk of being good Catholics, being good Christians, doing good things even in the name of Jesus, you know, participating in the life of the church, and maybe even having moments of real fruitfulness and evangelization, and maybe even being a part of people coming to know the Lord, and being part of the discipleship process for someone; How can we do all that, and yet feel confident that we know the Lord?

Well, Jesus ties knowing the Lord, knowing Him, to doing the will of His Father. And the scripture is full of proclamations of God the Father's will for us, but I

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want to highlight one of them, because then it becomes a little circular here. But I want to highlight one very direct command from God the Father, and that's the one I want to focus on. Because there's a lot of different areas we could go, but I want to just say let's just do this one, okay. Or let's focus on this one.

So it's a little earlier in Matthew, Matthew chapter 3. The baptism of Jesus, right. So John the Baptist baptizes Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes down like a dove, the heavens open up, and what do we hear? A voice from heaven saying "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." In another place it goes "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him." So here's what's interesting: God the Father's will for our life is to listen to His Son, to follow His Son, to obey His Son. And what does the Son say? "You are My friends if you do what I've commanded you."

He talks all the time, Jesus is constantly saying "You are My followers, you are My disciples when you are obedient to Me. When you follow Me. When you pattern your life after My life. When you do the things I have commanded you do to do." And not because he is this authoritarian dictator - "Do what I say all the time." - it's because He knows that the things He's asking to do actually transform us, or participate in the transformation process, so that we could become Him. And He knows that the only way we have the opportunity, at the end of our life, to enter into the Kingdom of God is if we are conformed in His image. That we become Him, and then enter into His Father's presence.

And so what the Father is saying is: "You want to know My will? My will is that you listen to My Son." And the Son's saying: "Great. You want to know what I'm saying." And then he lays it out, He lays out the beatitudes, He lays out all of these various teachings. And then at the end of the day though, for Jesus, it's about relationship with Him. It's about "You are My friends if you do what I command you." In other words, like, it's not enough to just be moving out on our own, but kind of under the guise of His presence, saying His name, doing His works. But is there a heart transformation that's coming through a lived experience and obedience and love with the Son?

So, then the question is: What's Jesus asking us to do, and how do we hear it? And there's a lot of different ways that we can hear the Father. But I want to just give you 2 simple questions that a disciple should ask every day, and in every area of their life. That if we can live in these 2 questions, there can be a certain confidence that you're trying, you're striving to live in the will of God, in the will of the Father expressed through the Son, and therefore in relationship with Them. And I don't want this to feel like a legalistic, moralistic thing, that Jesus' love is contingent on whether or not we do what He asks us to do. That's not... He loves us no matter what. But there is a relationship that is contingent on some behavior.

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There's kind of a journey and intimacy that does need, and receive, and is transformed by our participation in it. And so our actions do play a role in our intimacy with God.

Now, again, it doesn't mean His love is contingent on that, but obeying Him, hearing His voice, and doing... and acting on it does fall in line with the parameters, and the understanding, and the way that the Lord has set it up for us to enter into deep relationship with Him, and therefore be in deep relationship with the Father. So these 2 questions should form the basis of basically everything we do. The first one is this: "What is God saying to me?" The second one is: "What am I doing about it?" A certain kind of circular nature to it. What is God saying to me, and then what am I doing about it? What is God saying to me about my prayer life? What am I going to do about it? What is God saying to me about my sin? What am I going to do about it? What is God saying to me about my wife and my relationships? What am I going to do about it? What is God saying to me about, you name it - my work, everything. What is God saying, and then what am I going to do about it? How am I going to respond?

A disciple is constantly seeking the will of his master, and then acting upon that decree, that invitation, that challenge, whatever it is. Because sometimes what God is saying is very much an invitation, and sometimes what God is saying is very much a challenge; sometimes it's a corrective, sometimes it's a guidance; sometimes it's an encouragement, sometimes it's affirmation. God is constantly communicating to us, and constantly desiring to reveal His will for our life. And the question is: Are we listening? And then are we willing to do something about it?

And this doesn't mean that we live in this kind of perpetual nervous state of discernment, where it's like "Oh my gosh, I have to be doing the will of God. What if I'm not doing His will? Argh!" You know, that type of thing. That's not what I'm suggesting. There's a peace that actually comes from journeying with the Lord, journeying with Jesus, having deep intimacy with Him, constantly spending time with Him, and asking to know Him more, letting His heart transform our heart. And then being attentive to the inklings of the Spirit, when the Spirit starts to get our attention through words, through other people, through something we see, something we hear, and say "Wow, maybe God's saying something to me in this." That's the moment where the disciple takes a step back and says "What is God saying?" And then "What should I do about it?"

And in the process of hearing what He's saying, there's all sorts of things that go into that, right. We hear Him in scriptures, we hear Him through other people, we hear Him through the sacraments, we hear Him through all sorts of different

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environments. And there's lots of tremendous wisdom on how to hear the voice of God. So, you know, Ignatius of Loyola with the discernment of spirits and all of that, that is really, really important. And then when it comes time to actually do something about it, we want to get the input of others, we want to plan it, we want to focus on what the Lord kind of is revealing, taking stock of what might be needed in order to do what He's asking us to do. But if we can kind of live on the circle - sometimes they're big circles, like our vocation: "What is God saying to me about my whole life, and what am I going to do about it?" Sometimes it's little circles: "What is God saying to me right now in this moment with this cashier, and what does He want me to do about it?"

But if we can do that, we can confidently then say to Him "Lord, Lord," and hear "Well done, My good and faithful servant." Because you have been in obedient in small things, now you can have access to bigger things. The Lord is always, always, always desiring connection with His will, because He knows that His will is the thing that leads to the freedom, the joy, the peace, and ultimately the healing and the salvation that we were made for, and that we all desire.

So, read this scripture as a challenge. Let's not just be those who just pay lip service to union with God, pay lip service to following Him, but then in our actions there's nothing that changes. Let's not pay lip service to Him. And let's not only just be people who call on His name when it's time to do mighty things, like prophecy, and casting out demons, and all of those things, and doing mighty works. Let's not just be those people who are only reliant on Jesus for those big things, but in the everyday stuff of life, looking for opportunities to align ourselves with the will of the Father. And what is the will of the Father? To obey and listen to the Son. So our 2 questions today: "What is God saying to me?" And then "What are you going to do about it?" God bless you.