

## Heart of Discipleship



### 5. A Passion for Seeking God's Will (Acts 20:13-35; Ps 119:97-106)

This is the sixth sermon in our series *Heart of Discipleship* and in it we have seen that we are all called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not an optional extra. Baptism is a mark of that discipleship because it is a statement that we have repented: I am not going to go my way but I am going to walk God's way. *I have decided to follow Jesus - no turning back!* We then saw that the cost of going God's way, of following Jesus is very costly because He wants our whole allegiance. We saw that God equips us but also calls us to holiness.

This begs a question. If Jesus wants us to follow Him, then where - and how? It's one thing to have a passion for following Jesus, but this naturally follows that we should seek His will for our lives. So we do that don't we?

And that's the problem. We have no problem with the notion that God guides. Our problem with it invariably is that we never ask! In fact the scripture God gave me as I prepared for this morning was *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10)*

I'm going to come back to this in a few minutes because I believe that for most Christians this is the problem that is most central to divine guidance issues.

I don't think that most of us have a problem with the notion that God guides His people. Our problem is over who leads who. As you know, we have a new dog Judy. Judy likes to lead but she has to learn for her safety to be led. When we ask God to guide us, do we ask Him for guidance for OUR way, or to hear and obey the words "Follow me". We as His people should be committed to discerning His will and walking in that.

What is God's will? It's basically what God wants. In the NT this idea is expressed by the word *thelema* - what one wishes or has determined shall be done e.g. *of the purpose of God to bless mankind through Christ, of what God wishes to be done by us, commands, precepts, will, choice, inclination, desire, pleasure (Strong).*

We can look at God's will in three different ways:

#### 🕒 God's Moral Will

God as our creator and as believers, as our Father has made known His moral will for our lives. How do we know what is right and wrong? God has our Creator has already wired it into us. Take a look at Romans 1

*Romans 1: 20 For since the creation of the world God' s invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

Each person has that innate sense of the existence of God but as Paul looked at the history of man he saw that people in their “wisdom” turned to worship other things. This innate knowledge of God also extends to our consciences which are able to discern right from wrong and it is this we can appeal to when we talk to people about Him e.g.

*2 Cor 4:2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

However, the way in which we understand God's moral will for our lives is through God's word. I'm going to do a session on A Passion for God's Word in a later week, but suffice to say that we know what God desires of our moral standards because it's clearly written in black and white. Some people see the foundation of our morality as the Ten Commandments. In one sense they are, but as Jesus points out in Matthew, it was quite easy for people to keep the letter of them and miss what God actually requires of His people in terms of a purity of love in thought and not just in deed (Matthew 5). The Pharisees were a fine example of people who kept the Law, but their hearts and their deeds showed that they loved themselves and not God or their neighbour. Jesus correctly points out that the whole of the law and the prophets are summed up in just this statement:

*Matt 22: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "' Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ' Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

This idea of loving God and one another is the most persistent element in Jesus' teaching. It's because we are not called to keep moral law for the sake of it, but that we think, speak and act from our hearts and that is controlled by one simple principle - love - agape, the act of will and passion that puts God and others before ourselves in all that we say or do. The rest of God's requirements in the Old and New Testaments are living examples of how that works and represent as the psalmist puts it *Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path*. As we walk through life, we find that the word of God is living and relevant.

Why do I say all this apart from encouraging you to seek God through His Word? It's because there are many issues in life we should take as read and not bother to search God for more specific guidance. If you fall out with your brother and sister in Christ, then make it up. Don't bother to search hard for whether you should or not. Similarly, if someone offends you, don't hunt for whether you should forgive them or not. You just do.

The moral will of God is His desire for the lives of men and women. His desire is that all will come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). It's God's will. here's where we see will as a desire because He knows what's best for us. In the end we need to accept that through faith, just as well as we should listen to what God says in His word to follow Him.

The Bible is full of plenty of advice on how to live your life. Our problem is that so often we don't meditate upon it with the kind of enthusiasm the psalmist had and as a result we haven't a clue what God wants and ask for guidance when we don't need to because it's been there for thousands of years!

But let's not go down the Pharisees road like some Christians do and as we have been examining in our evening series on Galatians, become slaves to law again. I was brought up in a church where the Word of God was revered and examined carefully to make sure we lived to every jot and tittle. But where was the passion for God? Where

was the passion to please God? They used their intellect to try to work out what God had said, but they didn't call upon His Spirit to open the Word to them to make it real in their lives.

God speaks to us through His Word and by His Spirit. If we ask the Spirit for answers, don't expect to get too many unless you know and love God's written word because answers to most issues in life there and God has inspired a book so that He can use its words in your life and mine.

### God's Particular Will

However, we don't just believe in a God who just speaks through a book, but a Father who has entered our lives by His Spirit. Therefore we can seek God for guidance in all areas of our lives. In the passage we had read to us this morning we saw that Paul and his party were led by the Spirit in the practicalities of their journey to Jerusalem:

#### Allowed Himself to be led by the Spirit

*22 "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.*

The Spirit led Him and as a result Paul felt compelled to go to Jerusalem. The Spirit leads, we follow. As we shall explore next week, God's will can sometimes be difficult to follow - Paul knew the end was not good. But he felt compelled. What made Paul feel compelled? It wasn't doing something against his will, but being convinced of whom he had placed his trust. Take a look in 2 Cor 5 and you'll see what I mean:

*11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13 If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*

Paul did what he did because He was compelled by Christ's love. It is the Spirit who convinces us of sin, righteousness and coming judgement and who convinces us on that basis of God's will in our lives.

#### The Spirit revealed the future on a need to know basis

*23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.*

In fact, later in Chapter 20, God's will is further revealed to him by the prophet Agabus.

Why do I say all this. because God speaks to us today by His Spirit just as He did in the past. It is the Holy Spirit that opens up the understanding of God's Word, but it is also the Spirit who shows us the direction of our lives. And that direction is individual to each of us. The issue is not whether God leads us in this way because that's beyond question; but whether we do.

### God's Sovereign Will

This is a decision of God that is always carried out, nothing in the universe is ever able to stop it. It's when God speaks by oath. It's not the will of God by desire which is behind His moral requirements, but His will by decree. How do we know Jesus is coming back. Because God has decreed it. He's going to do it. It's a sovereign act of God. Miracles are sovereign acts of God because God does what He does according to

His purposes. Do you want to know the will of God. Then seek His sovereign will and walk in it.



I've consistently said this morning that as believers, none of us would disagree with the notion that God guides His people. But to many of us, God's will is a mystery. Why do Christians have a problem with it?

● Because we think God is mysterious

*"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.." (Cowper)* Really? To many Christians God is mysterious. That's a shame because God is not mysterious. Look at the following Scripture where Paul describes the gospel in the following terms: *Col 1: 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

We have a God who is anxious to spill the beans. He has made known to us mysteries that were hidden from others for generations. There is one sense in which God is so vast that He surpasses human understanding - but He is a Father who desired to know us. And through faith you have come to know Him.

If as a parent you have ever been in a strange place or just crossing a road, you put your hand out to guide your child across the road or whatever. That's our Heavenly Father - putting His hand out to lead us through the course of life. This morning, put your hand out to Him and let Him lead you through the minefield that is life.

● Because we want God to "rubber stamp" our will

I've already mentioned the tendency we have for us to want God to lead us in our way and not truly seek where HE wants us to go. We'll explore this more next week as it is one of the biggest impediments to both seeking and doing God's will.

● Because we can't be bothered

Let's get real and be honest towards the living God this morning. We know how we acquire the knowledge of God's will. We need to be people who meditate on God's word and ask the Spirit to open it up to us. We need to people that spend time in prayer asking God to speak to us and guide us.

So how much time do we spend with God? How much time do we desire His presence? If you are not aware of where God is leading you in life or the issues in your life that God is dealing with then have you spent time with God about it? We have a Father who is interested in every facet of our lives, but have we been bothered to share it with Him.

It's true as a church too. let me read a few verses of Acts 13

*13:1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. 4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus*

Here was a prayer meeting that shook the world. Here was a church that spent time with God and as a result Paul and Barnabas were sent out. They spent time with God and together they perceived what the Spirit was saying to the Church. So often our prayer meetings are about us telling God what WE want? Have we ever tried asking what HE wants. This applies equally in our personal prayer lives as in our corporate ones. What is God's will for that sick person God wants us to pray for? What is the outcome of that missionary situation. What is God saying? How is He speaking His word to us - through the Bible, through a prophecy, through speaking through our minds, through speaking through our life situations, through others?

The problem is - are we bothered to spend time in prayer and fasting. Are we prepared to spend time with God's word? If not then listen to the sound of silence.

**We don't ask!**

Let's go back to where we started. *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10)*

Do you want to know God's will? Ask! Spend time in God's presence. God reveals His mind and will to us. Sometimes it's in His sovereign will. But what we don't ask for we don't get.

Do we have a direction as a Church? I know where I believe God is calling us and am aware there are others who feel the same way as me. But we are called as believers to unity - and I've done plenty of sermons on that - which entails we seek God together. That's what they did in Antioch and look at the results. But if we are to do that, then we need to be people that desire to spend time in God's presence - individually and corporately.

Do we desire to follow our Lord and be His disciples. Then we need to be people who know the mysteries of His will for our life, and for the life of the Church. Let's ask, seek and find; to His glory. Amen

