

God's Will for the Universe

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Preacher: Mark Chew

- [0 : 0 0] Now our lives are filled with choices, aren't they? From the mundane ones, like what we will eat, to the big ones, like where we will live and what we will do for work.
- There was a time in life, in the world, where choices were fewer. In days gone by, where you were born was likely where you lived, probably for your entire life.
- Likewise, what your parents did was probably what you did as well for work. And even the decision on who you would marry wasn't made by you.
- In stark contrast, our choices today seem to be endless, don't they? You can do whatever you want, we're told. The world's your oyster.
- And yet, as Christians, we can find that rather stressful, can't we? Because as Christians, our heart's desire is to want to do God's will.
- [1 : 0 0] But what does that mean in practice? What if we make a wrong choice? What if we step off the path of God's will? So we think.
- What then? Well, if those questions are in your mind, then this is what we'll be looking at over the next three weeks. The title, which you have up there, is Knowing and Doing God's Will.
- Now, last week, these two items got delivered to my home. I wonder whether you recognize what they might be for. Probably not. It's pretty hard, isn't it, to tell what they're for, unless I told you what they belong to.
- Well, in a similar way, understanding God's will for our lives, trying to work that out is actually impossible unless we know what God's big picture is.
- In other words, we need to understand what God's will for the universe is, that's the title of the sermon, in order to understand what His will for us might be. And so today, that's what we're going to concentrate on, looking at God's will for this world, this universe, for human history.
- [2 : 1 2] And then in the next couple of weeks, we will see how that helps us to make decisions in life, from the big, so-called life-changing ones, to the mundane and small ones.
- Now, as we open the Bible, it soon becomes clear that actually, God has not left us in the dark. If you were with us when we studied Colossians, we saw that we were revealed to us in Colossians what God's purpose for this world is.
- And so here as well, in our passage today in Ephesians. So, if you look with me to begin with, at chapter 1 and verse 3, Paul says, Well, Well, we can see in verse 4 that God has a plan for creation.
- In fact, He's had a plan before even creation began. And that part of the purpose of creation is to choose a people for Himself. People who will be holy and blameless in His sight.
- And they will be people of great stature. Adopted to sonship is what the language is. Both men and women, boys and girls, will be adopted to sonship.

[3 : 51] They will be heirs, in other words, to God's kingdom. And not only is this God's will, it is His pleasure as well, as Paul says. Not so much as well that this is an afterthought in creation.

But actually, it's the very part of God's design for creation itself. Now, God had already made known this plan, even in the Old Testament.

First to Abraham, when He chose him, and then to Israel, His descendants. They were God's people in the Old Testament. God revealed that in our reading in Genesis today to Abraham.

I've got it back on the screen again. In verse 2, He says, I will bless you. But then at the bottom, He also says, I will make you a blessing to others. That is, all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

In other words, God will choose people from all nations, not just Israel. And Paul's point here in Ephesians is that these people will only be blessed in Christ.

[4 : 56] Yes, God wants to bless people, but blessing can only be found in Christ. Now, for God, though, His plan is not without its twists and turns.

It's just like that holiday you planned. You were going to fly straight from here to the Gold Coast and be sitting on the beach by lunchtime.

Just imagine that thought. And then you decided to fly Tiger Air. And you find when you got to the airport that they had cancelled your flight.

But they said, Oh, no, don't worry. We'll fly you to Brisbane instead. And then we'll bus you down to the Gold Coast along the Pacific Highway. But then, of course, as you are travelling on the Pacific Highway, you find that it's closed.

And you end up being put up in a motel just by the wayside. Of course, being Tiger Air, it's the cheapest motel. Well, in the same way, God's salvation history doesn't unfold in a straight line, does it?

[6 : 01] But unlike us, God is sovereign so that even the twists and turns are ordained by Him. And the first twist we find in the Bible in humanity is in the form of Adam and Eve who took the first opportunity they had to sin, that is, to rebel against the rule and the will of God.

They became exactly the opposite of what Paul says they are to be, holy and blameless. And in so doing, they took all of us with them. And so God had to send His Son to fulfil His plan.

God required the sacrifice of His perfect Son so that Jesus would take our place and instead of being punished, we would find forgiveness instead.

So, verse 7 and 8, In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us.

And here, when Paul speaks of God's grace, he's referring to Jesus' death. God's grace is what we need, not just a little amount, but a lavish amount of it, because there is no way that we can save ourselves.

[7 : 08] We are reliant on God's grace for salvation. Christ, the Son He loves, had to take our place. And so the second point is that in order for God's plan to be fulfilled, it required redemption, it required the cross.

the cross of Jesus is integral to God's will for this world. Without Jesus and the cross, God's purpose cannot be achieved.

And so, to make sense of God's purpose in this world, we need to understand the life and work of Jesus. And specifically, if you want to understand God's purpose for your life, then you need to understand the cross and how to live in light of it.

Now, thirdly, we find that Jesus' death isn't simply a stopover. He's not like that motel on the way to the Gold Coast.

Once you're done with it, you can move on and head to your destination. No, Christ is the beginning and the end of our journey. He's not someone you can dispense with once your sins are forgiven, but rather, He is also our destination.

[8 : 19] And that's why, if you look in verse 8 to 10, God reveals that His plan is to bring unity to all things where, how, under Christ. So, with all wisdom and understanding, He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

God's plan culminates in the One who died for us. He's not just the means, but He's the goal of God's purpose as well. And this is not just on earth, but in heaven as well.

So, that's why we have the title God's Will for the Universe. Now, Paul began in verse 3 by saying that every spiritual blessing in life is ours to enjoy in Christ.

But actually, the more you think about it, being in Christ is the ultimate blessing. Christ is the blessing from which all else flows. And without remaining in Him, there is actually no blessing.

And so really, knowing God's will is not that complicated, is it, in that sense? It's quite straightforward. And I know many of you know this already. God, the Creator, is a God of relationships and from the start He created us for relationship with Him.

[9 : 38] That is part of our purpose in life, to be in relationship with Him through His Son. And just imagine, that's such a great thing, isn't it?

The Master of the Universe didn't just create us and leave us to be, but His desire is to have us know Him, for Him to know us. So, you know, the Queen may not be interested in knowing you.

I know that might disappoint you, but that's the truth. The Prime Minister of Australia, he probably doesn't care who you are. But you know what? Who cares? Because God does.

God desires for us to know Him. But of course, with sin in our lives, the only way for God to do that is through Christ, through His blood and after our sins are forgiven.

But once that's occurred, we are included into Christ's body. In the Old Testament, God's people was Israel, but in the New Testament, is the church, Christ's body. That's why, although we didn't read it, Paul, later in this chapter, in verse 22, which I've got on the slide, he said, God placed all things under Christ's feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him.

[10 : 56] We are the fullness of Christ who fills everything in every way. Now, of course, it may be one thing to say that this is God's will and this is exactly what God is doing in history, but when we look up from God's Word, it often looks like there's not much evidence of that, is there?

Where do we find God bringing unity to all things? As we even look at the church, it seems to be dwindling in number and that could cause us to be discouraged or to doubt that actually God's will is being done.

But no, we mustn't be discouraged because God's work is often largely unseen. That's why Jesus told the parable of the net or the mustard seed and in it, He tells us how the extent of the kingdom is often unknown until the very end.

It starts out small and then grows very big or we're not sure what it is until finally it is revealed and we see how big and how enormous it is. It's like a crocodile with its entire body submerged.

I've got a picture of it here. All you can see sometimes is the eyes, can't you? Well, the church or the gathering of God's people, I know this is a weird analogy, but we're often like the eyes of the crocodile.

[12 : 12] It's that only part of God's kingdom that is visible to the world, to the naked eye. In the church, we catch a glimpse of God at work, but a lot of that work is actually unseen.

When people come to Christ, when we grow in faith, you can't really see that, can you? It largely also goes unreported in the news. So, imagine this.

Even as the angels are rejoicing when a sinner is saved, imagine the party in heaven, there will not likely be an announcement on the nightly news. unless your name is Kanye West, of course.

Then everybody knows. And yet, despite the growth of the church being largely unseen, God is about his business of fulfilling his will and bringing unity to all things under Christ.

And so, each Sunday, at Sunday school, God is doing that among the young in our church. In two weeks, we're going to have four baptisms at 5pm. That is evidence of God's will being done.

[13 : 18] Two of them have come to Christ through Christianity Explored. That work was part of doing God's will. You see, God is fulfilling his will, isn't he, in this world. And guess what?

If you are a believer in Christ, yep, that's you, you're evidence that God's will is being fulfilled in history. You, you are evidence that God is at work in this world.

Now, what does this all mean then for us? How do we apply? What implications are there? Well, I've got three in the outline which is on the bottom half. And the first is that those who are in Christ need to realize that we are already in God's will.

You know, sometimes we can wonder, even as Christians, what God's will for us is. We think, God, what should I be doing? Should I do this? Should I do that?

And God, what if I fail to hear your will for me? You know, what's going to happen? Well, these are reasonable questions to ask and we're going to look more about that in detail in the coming weeks.

[14 : 23] But just for today, I would like us to just pause and let that sink in. We are already in God's will. By being in Christ, by being chosen by God, we are in God's will.

Paul goes on to say in verse 11, exactly this for the Jews and Gentiles. So he says, in him, we, that is the Jews, including Paul, were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

In order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And then you, that is the Gentiles, were also included in Christ when you heard the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation.

When you believe, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possessions.

That's all of us, the church, to the praise of his glory. And so the first thing to do, as Paul says, is actually just to rejoice and be thankful, be glad, praise God.

[15 : 33] the very fact that we believe demonstrates God's will is being fulfilled in our lives. We're already part of God's purposes for creation.

We don't actually have to do any more in that sense. We're a living testimony of the pleasure of God's will. That's real assurance and comfort, isn't it?

Even if you should fall sick, which means you can't do anything for the rest of your life, you are already in God's will. Sure, for the rest of us, we need to then work out what that means as we head out from church for tomorrow and the week and the week after that.

But sometimes we can get too anxious, can't we, about whether we're doing God's will. Well, let's not be. Let's realize that actually being in Christ is to be in God's will.

Now, of course, knowing this takes us to the second implication, which is that being in God's will means we are to then remain in God's will, which simply means remaining in Christ, to believe in the message of the gospel, to place our hope fully in Christ, to allow God's word to soak in us so that we know that, to devote ourselves to prayer and to be part of God's people, to come together on Sunday as a church and through the week as well.

[16 : 54] So, that's why I encourage those of you who are studying but still at church today, you are remaining in God's will by doing that. And as we do that, the third implication is we learn how we can then align our lives, that is, how we can live in light of God's will.

Now, some of you might still be wondering what these two parts were. I'll let you in. We had to buy a new clothes dryer recently and this is the metal bracket that you stick on the wall and then you hang the clothes dryer on.

This other plastic part is the rest that you know you put against the wall so that the dryer doesn't lean into the wall but it's sitting flush. Right? Got it now?

Yep. Mystery solved. Happy? Good. But the thing is that now that we know the big picture, the clothes dryer, then we also know what role each part has to play, right?

We know what God's will for them is, if you like. But imagine if this plastic part thought, you know what? I don't want to play the role of supporting the dryer.

[18 : 07] No, I want to be the piston engine of a Ferrari. Now, I don't think that would work, would it? Someone this morning thought maybe a Suzuki but no, maybe even not that.

Well, the same applies with God's will, isn't it? If God's will for the world is to bring unity to all things under Christ through the church, then God's will for our lives needs to be aligned to that vision as well, doesn't it?

God's will for us as a church, we need to align our vision and our mission as a church to that as well. You see, God doesn't have a separate plan for Mark 2, you know, which has me like that sign, heading in one direction whilst God's plan for the universe is heading in another, no.

Rather, what God's will for us is, needs to have us heading in the same direction as His will for the world. Now, does that mean I should be a carpenter or a teacher or a preacher or should our church plant in Blackburn or Eltham?

You know, does that mean I should be married or not? Well, those are questions we'll try and answer next week and the week after. These are the ones that often weigh us down, don't they? But the thing is that if we knew we were going to head to its Gold Coast, the Gold Coast, then we'll keep following the signs that say Gold Coast, don't we?

[19 : 31] Well, we're not going to turn off to head to Toowoomba, nor are we going to head in the opposite direction to the Sunshine Coast. No, if we knew we're headed to the Gold Coast, then we'll keep following the signs that head to the Gold Coast.

And that's what doing God's will is like. All our individual choices need to be made in light of the direction that we're going. God's big picture will. And so we need to be asking as we make choices, how does this choice help me to bring all things under Christ in my life but also in the world?

How does it help me to remain in Christ, remain in God's will? And if we sort of ask those kind of questions and take it seriously, then actually a lot of choices that we seem to have in our lives actually fall away.

Because when we evaluate it in that light, we can see quite clearly, actually, no, it's not actually helping us to achieve that, to bring all things under Christ in our lives or with other people.

We're going to say more about this in future weeks as we look in more detail how to apply it to day-to-day decisions.

[20 : 41] But as I close, I still find it amazing that God would reveal His grand plan to us. You know, blueprints are actually mostly closely guarded secrets, aren't they?

in fact, in Star Wars, they made a whole movie out of it, didn't they? For Rogue One, how they had to find the blueprint for the Death Star. Well, I've actually got a copy of it.

But you know what? God didn't keep us in the dark with His blueprint, did He? No, He made it known to us so that we may believe in Him, so that we may find our place and purpose in God's will.

And so even though we don't know the minute details of our lives, we can be assured that if we are in Christ, we are in His will and we have the hope of glory that awaits us when we continue to remain in Him.

So why don't I pray and thank God for it and ask God to help us to remain in Christ. Father, thank You for choosing us before the creation to be holy and blameless, just like Your Son who came to redeem us by His blood so that we may be restored and forgiven of our sins.

[21 : 52] Thank You that we are in Your will, that You have brought us under the Lordship of Jesus so that we may fulfill the purpose for which You created us.

Help us to live in line with this to the praise of Your glory and the glory of Your Son's name in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.