

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Eighth Sunday after Trinity

August 7, 2022

Text: Matthew 7:15–23

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Only those who do the will of God the Father almighty will enter the kingdom of heaven. That is the wondrous and sobering truth Jesus teaches us today in the gospel text which comes from the conclusion of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' Will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." There are any number of questions such a statement should generate. But the first and most obvious one is, "What is the Father's will that we must do?" And if we take Jesus' teaching seriously, we must conclude that there cannot be a more important question. Our eternal future is at stake; it demands our greatest attention.

There are so many things that are urgent things, demanding our attention at the present time. A new school year is just around the corner. Decades-high inflation continues to create anxiety. The war in the Ukraine has been a source of worry and a drain on the world-wide economy for many months. And now, tensions with China are rising. Everyday life, by its very nature, requires an enormous amount of physical and spiritual energy. Going to work, setting meals on the table, clothing our family, and so forth. As valid as all these things are, the single most important question we must consider is, "What is God the Father's will that I must do in order to enter His heavenly kingdom?" "Are there any resources given to me, my family, and loved ones that will ensure that I do the will of the Father leading to eternal life in His kingdom?"

As we consider these most important questions, we must know, at the very beginning, that if we successfully manage all the various opportunities and challenges of life in this world but fail to do the Father's will leading to eternal life, then what have we actually accomplished? We gain a good thing but loose

the greatest and best thing. On another occasion, Jesus spoke about the absolute priority of being prepared for God's kingdom. Mark 8:36–37:

³⁶For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

³⁷For what can a man give in return for his soul?

Would we trade our soul for material wealth, peace, happiness, any and every form of fulfilment? Doing the will of the Father that leads to eternal life is something very different from achieving the advancements available for life in this world. There is nothing wrong with having material prosperity and a happy life. But our Lord sets before us the most important thing: eternal life in His Father's kingdom. Everything else must fall under that most important thing.

God the Father's will for you and for every man, woman, and child is to have saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For only through faith in Christ can we have eternal life in the Father's kingdom. Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, 9 statements of blessedness related to the kingdom of God. Take, for example, the very first Beatitude – the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). The poor in spirit are those who recognize in themselves, they have nothing to earn, achieve, or in any way obtain God's kingdom. The poor in spirit look to Christ Jesus for aid and strength. Jesus began and ended His sermon with reference to His Father's kingdom. Everything in between, chapters 5, 6, and 7, is related to Christ's desire for His people to live in His Father's kingdom. The Father's will is for you to have saving faith in His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christians, our entire lives is to be ordered and arranged with this most important thing. Faith in Christ unto eternal life in the Father's Kingdom.

During a separate occasion and before a different crowd, Jesus preached about His life and ministry fulfilling the will of His heavenly Father. Listen to John 6:37–40. As I read these few verses, listen for two things. First, Jesus Himself seeks and fulfills His Father's will, second, Jesus fulfilling His Father's will results in salvation for everyone who believes in Jesus:

³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Jesus came to do His Father’s will of saving everyone whom the Father has placed into Jesus’ eternal care. Take note of this, dear saints of God. Jesus, the beloved Son of the Father incarnate in Mary’s womb through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, gladly fulfills His Father’s will. He takes those whom the Father places in His hands and He keeps them safe and secure. Those who rest in the hands of Jesus will enter God’s kingdom. On the great and Last Day, the exalted Lord Jesus will return to this earth to raise all the dead. But for those looked to Him for the highest good of life in the Father’s kingdom, Jesus will raise from the dead and give them the glory of His Father’s kingdom. That, dear saints of God, is the Father’s will for your life! That is His will for this congregation. Faith in Christ Jesus, the Savior who died and rose again from the dead to purify your life and soul from every sin and evil. The Lord Jesus reveals the Father’s will: to save you and to save the world!

As we consider the Father’s will for our lives, we must see and understand it rightly. To be sure, the Father’s will is almighty and glorious. When we pray, “Thy will be done” in the Lord’s Prayer, we must not think we are somehow encouraging God to do something He doesn’t really want to do or is barely able to do. Not so. We pray for God’s will to be done knowing with absolute confident His powerful will shall be accomplished. But we should not think of God’s will primarily in terms of raw power or strength. He is almighty. Don’t get me wrong here. But the Father’s will is one primarily characterized by love. The Father wills to save His people because He loves His people. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Love seeks the good of the beloved. To share with them in all that is good, wholesome, joyous, and true. Thus the Father’s will to save you and the world through His Son is a will to love unto eternal life. To give the highest good, to give of

Himself so that all who look to Christ in saving faith will also participate in God's life and fellowship. The most important thing, the highest possible good, is to have faith in Jesus and live in His Father's kingdom, now and into eternity.

But there is a warning we must heed from Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Jesus says it is possible to be deceived so that a person does not do the will of the Father. This peril is caused by two things. First, false teachers. Jesus described them in vs. 15 as ravenous wolves who come in sheep's clothing. Christians are commanded by Christ Himself not to listen to them. We recognize false teachers by their fruit (vs. 20), their fruit being 1) the rejection of sound Biblical doctrine centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and 2) an immoral life often marked by vice, greed, and selfishness.

False teachers are the first peril. But there is a second peril described by Jesus vs. 22–23. Self-deception. These are people who claim to be Christians but do not know Jesus by faith. Tragically, Jesus does not know them either (vs. 23). These self-deceived people thought they were Christians because of their good works rather than simple faith in Jesus. We return back to that very first Beatitude we considered a few moments ago. Christians are not boastful. Look at what I can do in Christ's name. No, Christians are the poor in spirit who place all their hopes, their longings, their faith and love in Christ alone. He is the Savior. Jesus reveals the will of the Father. To do His will is to believe in His Son and live a life of faith and obedience that proclaims His mercy and love.

Christ Jesus has provided all that we need to enter His Father's kingdom. He gives Himself to us. His eternal life and the love of the Father. God's will for your life is believe in His Son Jesus and live your life in His love. God grant it for Christ's sake.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.