

Confident Prayer

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Bible Verse: 1 John 5:14-15
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We come to 1 John 5:14-15 and I think it's a really critical passage and it kind of prepares us for the study that I have planned for the month of July from Ephesians 6. In these extraordinary times in which we live where nothing seems stable, nothing seems secure, you know, it was only three months ago, a little over three months ago that the world changed and it has no obvious indication that things are going to go back to normal anytime soon whatsoever, and it leaves us as a church, it leaves us as Christians kind of with standing at a fork in the road, I think, as I see people comment online and as I interact with others. We're just going to have to come to a decision, a point of inflection in terms of what we're going to do about living in a world like this. My sad perception is, I could be mistaken about this but it seems that so many people in the Christian church are heading toward the way of anxiety, of fear, of looking for political solutions to the things that are happening for us, and that's only going to get worse as we get closer to the Presidential election in November, and none of these things are good. They do not bode well for the health of the people of God and there's a couple of things that I just want to say by way of preface to looking at this text and you'll see, I think it'll all fit together in the end.

First of all, is that as we approach this text in 1 John 5:13-15 really, the whole atmosphere of the text, it breathes out confidence and it breathes out security and it breathes out trust. Friends, this is what Christian life is supposed to be like regardless of what's happening around us. I simply cannot, it just is a crushing weight to me. The political and social stuff is bad enough for what it is, but it just crushes me to see professing Christians not living like Christians and not thinking like Christians and not having a spirit about them that is reflective of the confidence that should be ours in Christ. And we should not be people that are marked by fear. Fear, it is a deadly component in spiritual life and there is no reason for Christians to be living in fear no matter what is happening around us, and so we need to get this, we need to get this straight because the winds are going to howl more in the coming months even than they are right now and the whole spirit of this passage is one of confidence.

Look at 1 John 5 with me and I'll just read the preceding verse in verse 13 where it says,

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 This is the

confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

And so there is this great spirit of confidence, security and trust that is permeating the passage that is in front of us and that is the spirit that I want us to drink in tonight and what needs to shape us in the days to come.

Now along with that, it's not often that these two passage are put side-by-side, they're just side-by-side in my mind because of my pulpit preparation, look over at Ephesians 6. Ephesians 6. These things are linked thematically even if they're not linked in terms of direct parallel in a biblical interpretation, you might say. But I want you to see them. I can't control what happens in the world, neither can you, but we can be mindful of the kinds of Christians that we're supposed to be and that's what, that's all that's given to us, that's my responsibility is to try to help the people of God live like Christians. Now and that's what I want to do here tonight.

Now in Ephesians 6:10 what do you find but these words where the Apostle Paul says after explaining to people that they've been chosen by God, they've been redeemed by Christ, they've been sealed by the Spirit, they've been saved by grace through faith, not of works lest any man should boast, and that God has prepared works beforehand that we should walk in them. That's the broad look at the themes of chapters 1 and 2, and in chapter 4 he talks about the importance of unity and Christian growth and all of these things that we'll review in July. But beloved, the thing that just tends to get swallowed up as so many people walk by sight and not by faith, is the fact that our God has saved us and our God is favorably disposed to us, and our God is powerful and our God is able to keep us. Now either we believe that or we don't and if we don't really believe that, we're kind of wasting our time because we're just going to be tossed about by the winds of everything that's happening anyway. But that is not the way that Christians are supposed to be living and we're not to be preoccupied with the things of life that are happening in this temporal world around us. We are cut from a different cloth and we are supposed to live accordingly.

So in Ephesians 6:10 after laying these things out about the greatness of the Christian position, the greatness of the power of God who is able to do exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, well, we're supposed to live in light of that. Look at verse 10, chapter 6, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." Be strong. Be strong. We should not be tossed around by what's happening in the world around us. And then as you go on and you read in the following verses, I just want to point out this theme that we're going to focus on more in a couple of weeks where he says in verse 11, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." He talks about the struggle in verse 12. He says in verse 13, "take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore." Three times in that brief passage he says, "Stand firm. Stand firm. Stand firm." And what our obligation and what

our responsibility is, is not to change the world around us, we just need to stand firm in Christ and as the waves come upon us and pound upon us, we're standing like that impregnable, that immovable lighthouse that stands against the waves and emits light into the darkness and stands firm against the waves and eventually the waves recede and the lighthouse is still standing. That's what we're to be like, beloved. We are to be standing firm, not swallowed up in fear, not swallowed up in anger, not swallowed up in agitation about the things that are happening around us.

And the reason that we can stand firm and, by the way, what that means for us as a church is, you know what we're gonna do, at least what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna keep teaching the same things over and over again, saying the same things from the same word of God that we've been saying for the past eight years. We're not going to change our message to adapt to the culture around us. We're not going to change our message to adapt to the social justice demands of very prominent and influential voices within the Christian church. We're not going to do that. We're just going to stand firm doing what we've always done and trust the Lord to bless that, and that at the end, you know, when we get on the other side of all of this agitation, you know, I'm confident that the Lord will have blessed us for doing just exactly that. So I know that that's what you desire in your own life. I know that you desire to stand in truth and on truth, and I'm just here to assure you tonight that nothing's going to change about this pulpit because we're just going to keep doing what we're doing as a manifestation of our commitment to honor the word of God that tells us to stand firm, stand firm, stand firm, and don't be tossed about by the various winds of doctrine.

Look over at chapter 4, verse 14 of Ephesians. Ephesians 4:14. The fact that society has changed, the fact that the church is changing around us and changing from within has nothing to do with us. It does not affect us in what we do whatsoever. Ephesians 4:14, "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." So we're not meant to be tossed back and forth. The political changes, the social changes, the ecclesiastical changes, we're just meant to keep doing what we're doing and the question is where do you find the strength to do that? Where is it that you find the confidence to do that and to not be shaken by the fact that we're receding, what I mean by that is that, you know, there's just a smaller minority of people that want to just keep teaching and embracing sound doctrine as the purpose of the church and as the purpose of life. How can you do that? How do you stand firm, then?

Well, I believe that it's rooted in the fact and the understanding of the things that we've been talking about from 1 John. It's rooted in the reality that our God has saved us and been gracious to us in our sinful condition. He has rescued us from the world. He has rescued us from Satan. He has rescued us from sin. We realize that there is an eternal plan at work that God established before the beginning of time, and that he is certainly working out his purposes even through all of the agitation that is around us and all of the uncertainty that's around us. God is working out his purpose and in the end he will have

shown himself to have been completely sovereign over it all and not one of his little children, not one of his sheep were lost in the process.

Well, that's an awful lot of security to live in and it's something that the world knows nothing about and so we find our ability to stand firm in the knowledge and the recognition that our God is favorably disposed to us as he proved, as he showed in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we don't have to be all worked up. We're standing on a firm foundation. We are resting in Christ. We are resting in the immutable Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever, and so there's no reason for us to change with the shifting winds of the society and the politics that are all around us. We don't need to do that. We should not do that and we will not do that here. God, give us grace to fulfill that commitment of our hearts.

So back to 1 John 5, then, with all of that in mind. I just want you to see that these realities of assurance and confidence of which we're speaking, they are living, vibrating, pulsating necessities for our spiritual lives as we walk through the times in which we live. Chapter 5, verse 13. Last time we saw the basis for Christian assurance, of our confidence in our salvation. Verse 13, look at it with me where he said,

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

And what we said last time is assurance is a believer's confidence that he possesses salvation now through faith in Christ and that he is bound for heaven. If you have an assurance of your salvation, the greatest and most essential realities are settled for you. You will one day stand before God in judgment. What assurance means is that you already know now how that future day of judgment will go; that God has accepted you as righteous in his sight for the sake of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ; that all of your sins have been pardoned for the sake of Christ and in his blood; and that God accepts you as righteous, as acceptable for his presence, as welcome in his presence because Christ has shared his righteousness with you. As it were, he stretched his wings over you and covered you with his righteousness so that there is no sin of yours to be seen in the presence of God. And Scripture says as I often like to remind you, God has said, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. As far as the east is from the west," Psalm 103 says, "so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Well, if those things are settled, then there should be this ever-increasing, billowing, growing and expanding in your heart that it's well with my soul, and that's what assurance of salvation does for you. You know, there's this confidence and I can walk through this world and I can walk through the difficulties and challenges and sorrows of my individual persona life with an underlying controlling sense of confident joy that it is going to be well between me and God and in the end nothing else matters than that. And so that's the confidence that we have.

Now what John does here as he speaks about this confidence and this assurance, is now having established the basis of assurance, he now, as it were, he looks forward, he

projects into what that means for your spiritual life going forward and what it means for you as a believer going forward. And what a settled assurance of your salvation does is it has a profound effect on the way that you pray, and on the way that you, if we can use this language, the way that you commune with God, the way that you think about God and the sense of mind that you have as you contemplate God and you're in his presence. And what we find here is that John is teaching us that assurance should lead you to confident prayer and that's the title of tonight's message, "Confident Prayer." If you know that it's well between you and God, then that should promote within your heart that which Ephesians 3:12 talks about, there is a bold and confident access that you have before God. It should not be stilted. It certainly should not be mechanical. It should not be simply rote repetition of memorized prayers from your childhood, but rather an ever-growing transparency of soul in which you speak the things that are on your heart with an overwhelming confidence that the Lord hears you. And mark this, beloved, it's not simply that he hears you and he's aware of what you're saying, when you pray as a Christian with a full assurance of salvation, you understand that God is hearing you favorably, God is receiving well what you say, God welcomes your prayer and that is an encouragement and an incentive for you to pray all the more with an ever-increasing sense of intimacy before him. You can't get away from the doctrine that frames this kind of passage.

So what we want to look at first of all tonight is the nature of our requests when we pray, the nature of our requests and we see this in verse 14, we come to a most fundamental principle of the Christian life and asking the question, you can think about it this way, you know, what is it that we pray for? What frames the nature of your requests? Why do you pray? Well, what I want to show you here tonight, hopefully we'll succeed in doing it, is that the way that you pray is shaped by the reason that you understand that you live. The reason that you exist as a Christian, why did God save you? What does God want out of your life? Well, to answer my own question: God saved you, in one sense, God saved you so that you would be an instrument of his will. God saved you to increasingly conform to the image of Christ and to be one who is conformed increasingly to the will of God, the moral will of God. You are reflecting his moral character more and more. So when you understand that fundamental principle, then you understand that the way that you pray lines up with that greater reality.

Look at verse 14 with me. He says,

14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will [that's what I was pointing to], He hears us.

Now what is this confidence of which he speaks? It's a word that was originally used in ancient Greece to speak about a citizen's fundamental right of freedom of speech. The idea was that a Greek citizen could speak freely his mind in political discourse without fear of retribution and that he was entitled to say whatever he wanted to say. The word came as a result to start to express other concepts, speaking about plain and direct communication. It has the idea of openness and boldness; because you know that you have the right to speak, then it gives you courage and incentive to express yourself in unhindered ways.

So in days gone by at least in our country, you had freedom of speech and you could speak rightly without fear of retribution. That's obviously changing, you know, in front of our very eyes, but in terms of the presence of God, nothing has changed. God saved you and has declared you righteous in his sight. He has made you a child of God. He has brought you into his family. You are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. And so all of those different aspects of expressing our position before God inform the way that we pray, then. It means that we have, God has given to us the right and the prerogative and the privilege to speak in his presence and when we do that, he hears us, this text says. That is the nature of prayer that flows from assurance. Not the rote prayers of our childhood but the increasingly intimate and the increasingly mature and informed themes that come out of a growing and believing heart. Let that sink in for a bit. We have an audience with God and we are called to speak with him in confidence plainly, directly, openly, boldly.

Now John has used this very word "confidence" multiple times in the letter. Look over at 1 John 2:28. I want you to see that this theme of confidence has underwritten everything that John has said throughout the course of his letter. Remember as you're turning there, we've said that there are three primary themes that John has expressed in this letter: the idea of joy; the idea of holiness; and the idea of assurance. All of these spiritual qualities designed to be present and growing in the life of every true believer. Well, if you have joy and you know you're growing in holiness and you have assurance, well, that is designed to promote in you a sense of confidence before God, a confidence in his presence, that he receives you well and he welcomes you, so that in 1 John 2:28, the author of this letter says this, he says, "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." The idea of a growing sense of assurance, it does away with shame at the coming of Christ. We don't have to shrink back in fear of him. This is spoken in the context of judgment here in this verse that we wouldn't be afraid and retiring, shrinking back in judgment. Well, you know, just take that future effect and bring it into the present and it's what's to mark us now as well so that our prayer is confident, not shrinking away. We approach God in a reverent sense, an assurance that he receives us and we don't shrink away from him in shame at his coming, all of this purchased for us by the blood of Christ.

Chapter 3, verse 21, you see it again and we'll come back to this text later in the message. Chapter 3, verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him." Open, plain certainty, an assurance, a trust that is well-grounded that is to frame the way that we think about God and the way that we speak to him, and our sense of understanding about how he receives us.

Now those of you that grew up in legalistic backgrounds, those of you that grew up in forms of religion that produced a lot of shame and a lot of guilt and a lot of fear, I realize that this is a lot of ground to try to conquer in your life because it's been so deeply rooted something the opposite has been rooted into you. Well, the only way that we can dislodge

that and tear down those false systems in your mind and build them up with the right things is to look at the plain word of God, that John is writing to promote a sense of confidence in you in the presence of God, a sense that you are welcome, that you are invited. And Christ spoke about this, look over at Matthew 7 as the, you know, God's word just interprets itself and makes itself alive to us. This is the same thing that we've been emphasizing for the past couple of years now over and over again, the love of God for his people. The certainty of his goodness toward those who are his own.

Matthew 7:7. Look at the confidence that undergirds what Jesus says to his disciples as they speak to their heavenly Father. Verse 7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" Confidence. Confidence. Confidence in the goodness of God, in the reconciliation we have with him in Christ, and all of this shaping the entire way that we think vertically in relation to him.

Go back to 1 John, if you would, to chapter 4, verse 17 where we see this same word for confidence again. The Greek word is *parresia*. 1 John 4:17, "By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world." Confidence. Ephesians 3:12, bold and confident access to the throne of grace. Well, beloved, then if we have this kind of confidence secured for us by our Savior, if that is the position that we have in Christ, and it is the position that we have in Christ, then how should we think, what should be our attitude as we go to him in prayer?

Look back at verse 14 with me now. He says, "This is the confidence which we have before Him," that we have in his presence, "that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." And notice that phrase "according to His will" which I emphasized earlier. Here's the thing that we need to as we grow in prayer together and as we're studying these things together, this is the direction that you need to go and to understand. Prayer is given to you so that you may seek the advance of biblical priorities, that you are seeking the advance of the will of God. Prayer is given to you so that you could grow in the will of God in your embrace of the will of God, and that you would submit to the will of God as he works out his purposes in your life. Prayer is designed for you to submit to the will of God.

Now I know for some people that's brand new to hear because we're used to thinking about praying in terms of getting God to do what we want him to do, and to smooth out the bumps in our life, and to make the nation go in the direction that we want the nation to go, and all of that. Well, we need to think, we need to just grow up. I don't know how else to say it. I just want to be candid with you this evening, all designed to encourage and help you, not to rebuke you. We just need to grow up and realize who is God and who we are in response. Jesus, our Lord Jesus taught us about this aspect of prayer and

the centrality of the will of God in prayer by what he said, the way he taught us, and also by his own example.

In Matthew 6:33, you do not have to turn there, I'll just quote it for you. Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." The highest priority for the Christian is the kingdom of God. That is our highest priority. That's what we care about the most. We are the glad, loving subjects of the King, the King of heaven. We are the glad and willing, loving subjects of the King and what we want is for the King to be honored, we want the King to be glorified, we want him lifted up, we want what he wants to be done. We are in submission to him. We embrace him, not simply as Savior but as Lord, and as Lord we want his will to be done more than anything else. We seek that first. That is the highest of priorities to us and I'll remind you lest I get into a whole other series in tonight's message, I'll remind you that that verse appears in the middle of Jesus' teaching on anxiety. "Be anxious for nothing. Let tomorrow care for itself. Stop being worried," Jesus says. Matthew 6:25. Matthew 6:30. Matthew 6:34. And in the midst of all of this teaching about anxiety, Jesus says what you need to do instead is to seek first his kingdom. You're seeking his will.

Now along with that when Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6, one of the central aspects in the Lord's Prayer, how he taught us to pray, Matthew 6:10 after he said, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Now look, we're gathered here predominantly as a body of believers here in Christ here tonight. Having received Christ as Lord, then he is our teacher. He is our teacher in every area of life and he is our teacher in the realm of prayer in particular. We are in the position of the weakness of the disciples who often said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray. I don't know how to pray, Lord. I hear You pray," you know, in the first century sandals of the disciples, they heard him pray and they say, "That is foreign to my experience. There is a realm there that You know, Lord, that we don't have. How can we get there? How do we pray like You do? How do we pray in a manner that You would have us to pray? Teach us because we just have these lisping, stammering lips and our minds are so small and tiny and earthbound. Lord, how do we get beyond that in order to pray like a real disciple? How do we do that?" Jesus told us, he said, "What you need to pray is, 'Your will be done.'"

Now he not only said that, he lived it, didn't he? You remember Gethsemane? You remember as he was on the brink of crucifixion, on the brink of bearing the weight, the judgment of God for the sins of his people, recognizing the horror that was just around the corner from him? How did he pray? How did he pray when a far great – oh, mark this – when a far eternally more significant affliction awaited him within the next 24 hours of his life, far greater affliction than anything that we are facing in this world that anybody of any race is facing in this world right now, how did he pray then? What did he say to his Father? Mark 14:36, he said, "Father, remove this cup from Me yet not what I will but what You will. Not My will but Thine be done." In the midst of the crucible of the highest, deepest, most eternal affliction that any man ever was to face and knowing that he was going to bear that alone, Christ looked it full in the face and prayed to his Father,

"Father, it's not what I want here. Your will be done." And he submitted to his Father in his hour of affliction and that is how he prayed. "Not what I will, but Your will be done."

Now beloved, we need to think and we need to be honest with each other here and we need to let God's word kind of sift us here. I'll speak in the third person about people out there. You can observe as I speak about people out there, understanding that as I do, I'm speaking to all of us including me in here, right? As Christians we've been taught and we've been conditioned to pray for God to change our circumstances and we tend to make that the prominent priority in prayer as we deal with different kinds of difficulties that we go through. We have a problem, "God, help me with my problem." Now please understand what I'm saying here. There is a place for that kind of dependent praying to God. Jesus did say, after all, "Give us this day our daily bread." There is a place for that as one aspect among a much broader greater prayer life but, beloved, I want to suggest to you that that is a subordinate role and most of us are missing the primary purpose of prayer as we walk through the Christian life. You can look at any prayer list that's generated by any church anywhere in the country and you'll find that it's predominantly dealing with earthbound matters. There's just no other way to say it.

Now listen to me carefully. I'm speaking here to help you. I'm speaking as one needing these words myself, having been bruised along the way and trying to learn some of these lessons, you know, over the few decades that I've been a Christian. Listen to me carefully in what I say. Beloved, there is nothing uniquely Christian about wanting a higher power to help you in life. You don't need to be a Christian to want God or some other god to help you with your problems in life. There's nothing inherently regenerate about that. What starts to manifest a Christian position in prayer is what assurance transforms you into where the will of God, the God of the Bible, where the will of God is a greater concern to you than anything that might happen to you in this life. Affliction comes, sorrow comes, reversal comes, financial misfortune comes, in the midst of that, to have central in your perspective, "Lord, Your will be done here, not mine. God, I understand that You are in perfect providential control of all of the circumstances of my life. Nothing is beyond Your control here. Nothing is beyond Your knowledge here. Indeed, You sent these circumstances to me. I don't need to inform You about what's happening, God. I'm not here to give You information. I'm just here to ask You to do Your will in the midst of it because, Father, I know You're a loving God, I know You're a gracious God, You're a good God, and how else could it be? You saved me from sin. You have reconciled me through the Lord Jesus Christ. You have to be loving and good in all things to me because otherwise You would violate Your own character. And therefore, God, I trust Your wisdom, I trust Your love, I trust Your goodness enough to say, 'Father, Your will be done even if it's painful to me in the meantime.'" The Christian way to pray, the Christian spirit of prayer is to prefer the honor of Christ, to prefer the righteousness of Christ to our own happiness.

So the spirit of our prayer is more and more should become, "God, I want You to know that Your glory is more important to me than my happiness. Your glory is more important than my personal prosperity. Your will is the most important thing in my life and that's what I pray for, Lord, is for the accomplishment of Your will in my life just as my Savior

prayed under far greater affliction and He prayed it to my benefit, Father. What else can I say except, 'Father, not my will but Thine be done'? Can I pray any differently, God, than what my Lord did in His affliction? God, while these circumstances are difficult, Your will be done." At some point, beloved, at some point we have to get beyond our earthbound, sight-filled perspective on life and circumstances and enter into this realm that walks by faith and that prefers the glory and will of God to everything else in life.

Look over at 2 Corinthians 12. This is the lesson that the Apostle Paul had to learn, isn't it? And he learned it. What Paul learned, the character that the Lord developed in Paul is the character that every Christian should aspire after and can attain to. 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul said, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself!" God gave a messenger of Satan, whatever that was, to Paul simply to keep him from pride.

So in verse 8 Paul says, "Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me." "Lord, change my circumstances. Take this away. Take this away." And what was the outcome of it in verse 9? "He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" Ah, that changes everything. Then grace is enough for me. The circumstances don't have to change for me to be content and satisfied in life. Indeed, my weakness becomes the platform upon which the glory and grace and power of God is displayed. If that's true, if I love the glory of God more than anything else, then why would I want the weakness taken away if that is the vehicle by which that glory that I love is manifested? You say, "Well, because it'd be more comfortable without it." Okay, so we've got to start all over here, is that what we're saying? We're standing at, we're standing in front of majestic architecturally brilliant doors that are waiting to open and bring us into a realm of splendor if we would just open the door and walk through, and instead of preferring what we want in this life, we instead prefer to see the grace and glory of God on display, then Paul shows us how it affects the way that we think.

Look there in the middle of verse 9 of 2 Corinthians 12, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Now with all of that perspective, let's go back to 1 John 5:14. The challenge of God's word here is just immense but it's more than just a challenge. This is how we can live. This is the spiritual blood that can be coursing through your veins, the things of which we're speaking here tonight, this preference for God's glory over our circumstances. You know, I'd love the kingdom of God more than the nation in which we live; to prefer his glory to our personal comfort. This is what the Christian life is like. This is the nobility of it, to live for something that's bigger than us, that's bigger than, you know, what we want out of life. You don't have to be a Christian to want what you want out of life. You don't have to be a Christian to just want things to go your way. You see that, right? Well, once you understand that, you start to realize there's something far more here than what I've seen before and what my commitment to Christ and what my life in Christ is meant to be

so that when you have this assurance of salvation, it leads you to a spirit where you're asking for those things that are according to his will. And when we embrace that and pray that way and we're asking in that kind of spirit that we've been speaking about here tonight, those sweet words at the end of verse 14, look at them with me, "He hears us." He hears us.

And that leads us to the nature of his response. We've seen the nature of our request, "Father, Your will be done, as in heaven so also upon earth." Now we see the way that God responds to his people when they pray in this way. Look at verse 15. How does God respond when Christians pray according to his will. Verse 15,

15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask,

Well, this God who is hearing us is the God who is favorably disposed toward us. This God who designs our blessing, this God who gives not a snake when we ask for fish, not a stone when we ask for bread. He knows perfectly well how to give good gifts to his children, he knows how to do that. The God that's like that hears us when we pray. And when John says he hears us, beloved, isn't it obvious that he's saying he hears us favorably? He hears us sympathetically? Somehow in a way that we can't fully explain, the effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much. God acts in response to prayer in a way that I won't pretend to, you know, be able to exhaust for you here, but God hears us favorably.

Now listen, follow the thought here, I beg you. God hears us favorably? Of course he does. Of course he does. Think about this. What else would God do when one of his own children is seeking God's own pleasure and God's will in what he asks? Of course he hears that favorably. And of course he says yes when we are submitting to his will. Of course. It could be no other way. For a loving father to have a submissive loving child saying, "I want what you want," of course be delighted to answer that prayer. Why wouldn't he?

Now let me just clarify a couple of things here. This is not a promise that God will answer in a particular way that you specify. "God, I want X amount by this date. Or God, I want the election to go this particular way. Or God, I want this to happen within the realm of my family or my business or whatever it may be." That's not the promise here at all. It's not a promise that God will do what you tell him to do. In one sense, we don't even need to say that in light of everything that we've said because the whole premise, the whole spirit of this is we're asking God to do what he wants, not what we want. But just to clarify that God does not submit his sovereignty to our earthly emotional impulses in prayer. That could not possibly be what this passage is teaching us. This is a passage about serious Christians praying seriously for the will of God to be done.

Now along with that, go back to the text that we looked at earlier, chapter 3, verse 21, where we see the nature of answered prayer conditioned by an obedient, sanctified, Christian life. Verse 21, chapter 3, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His

commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." And so this is talking about an obedient believer seeking the will of God in his life and having an assurance that God answers in accordance with those kinds of requests. You see, this is not an invitation for carnal people to come in and demand what they want and expect God to give it to them. That's the furthest thing possible from the spirit of this passage. This is about a humble believer coming humbly before the God that he loves and trustingly saying, "Father, You do what You want. Here's the situation from my perspective. God, God, my request would be that You do this but, Father, what do I know? I'm a lisping, stammering infant that's not able to walk. You do what You want, Father, and I'll be confident that that will be wise and that will be good." You see, your first concern is knowing God, whether your life is pleasing to God. In other words – watch this and it could be no other way – the priorities, the Christian priorities of trusting God and obeying God shape everything that we ask. We pray with God's perspective in mind, in other words.

The commentator, John Stott, says this and I quote, he says, "Prayer is not a convenient device for imposing our will on God or bending His will to ours. It is the prescribed way to submit our will to His. It is by prayer that we seek God's will, embrace it, and align ourselves with it." And if you think about it, beloved, you don't want it to be any other way. God's will is good and perfect and acceptable in every conceivable way. His will is holy. His will is righteous. His will is good and is always designed for the good of his people and his will is perfect.

Now when you understand that and you believe that, why would you want God to do something different than his will in order to conform it to yours? That can only be a great big step down. That can't possibly be what's best. And for those of you that are on the front end of your Christian life, you're a younger Christian, you know, the reality personally, quite possibly socially that we're going to see is God doing something that looks completely different than what we think is good and what we think is best, and just having a complete lack of understanding of, "God, why would You do it this way? Why are You doing this? Why does it seem that unrighteousness is prevailing all around me?" That was the prayer of Habakkuk, chapter 1. "God, I cry out to You violence and You don't hear." Well, stay with him. Keep submitting to him in those times, you know, when you're longings for certain things in life just continue to be postponed and unfulfilled because, beloved, understand God has a great will that he's working out. He has a perfect will that he's working out and God sees beyond the immediate sins of today that so engulfs our thinking, God is working out an eternal purpose. God is working out things over years and decades and centuries. God is working out purposes that far transcend our lives. We are not in a position to evaluate it and when we humble ourselves under those undeniable realities, then it conditions us to pray in this way, "God, not my will but Thine be done." As we pray in that manner, beloved, God hears us and God blesses us in ways that go far beyond all that we could ask or think, and as we pray in this way, and this is, you know, we're talking about a lifestyle pattern of praying. This is what you develop and cultivate in your character and your response to God over a long course of time. This isn't a one-time, one-off thing and then you go back to the old way. You enter into this realm of biblical thinking and the doors close to going back. There's only one way, it's to go forward through those great doors into that majestic realm that they open up to us. And

beloved, as you respond to God that way, then you can watch with contentment as he unfolds his will over time. As you pray in that way, you can be confident of his blessing because, beloved, our Father knows what's best. He is in control and he loves us. It can only come out well in the end as he works out his will for us, then.

You know, one thing that I need to say. I'm at the end of my notes but there's one thing that I need to say. In days gone by, I don't hear many people talk this way in our circles anyway but no doubt it's there, but in days gone by I knew people who thought and spoke in this way, said, "You know, I just don't know how to pray for God to work this out. I don't know if I should ask for this or for that," and they just bound themselves and wrap themselves up like pretzels trying to figure out what would be best and then asking for that as if it was supposed to be that complicated. Well, that's not biblical praying and that's a foolish way to think and no wonder these people get crushed under the weight of things and under the weight of life. You can't possibly know what's best. You can't possibly understand how a loss, a tragedy, a loss of health, a loss of a loved one might work out for far greater purposes over the course of time than if that didn't happen. You can't understand those things. You can't anticipate them. God's ways are not our ways. His ways are higher than ours. His thoughts are higher than ours. So what we do as believers, then, is say, "God, whatever comes in the future, Your will be done. I'll trust You for that. I trust that providentially You're unfolding Your will as things come and as things go, and I'll submit to that, Lord, even when I don't understand. I'll believe You, I'll believe Your character is good and that You are only doing good for me even though I can't understand it, and even though this really hurts right now, God, I'm going to trust You and pray Thy will be done."

And so, my Christian friends, if you have an assurance of salvation, I ask you whether you will conform your prayer to his will and if all of this just seems so utterly foreign to your thinking and outside your spiritual experience, ask God to have mercy on your soul and to draw you to himself. Maybe he would save you and you would enter into his family for the first time in response to things like this.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we pray to close, we're mindful that there's a lot of uncertainty around us, there's a lot of difficulty that we face in life, sorrows, disappointments, challenges, all of those things that you know so well. Father, as we pray "Thy will be done" in the midst of these things, we trust You, that Your will will be good even if we don't understand as it unfolds day-by-day. But Father, as I pray for my brothers and sisters here in front of me, Lord, I would just also remind You, as it were, that You're the God of all comfort, that You comfort Your people in every affliction so that we might be able to comfort those who are in affliction with the comfort which we ourselves have received from God. Father, these are challenging times, these are difficult times for so many personally and certainly in our world around us. Comfort Your people, Father, even as You promised in Isaiah. Comfort Your people. Help us to find our rest in You. And as we pray sometimes with trembling hands and uncertainty in our hearts "Thy will be done," Father, we ask for Your Spirit to be swift to strengthen those spiritual desires, those spiritual impulses,

and that You would manifest Your sure and certain blessings to the people of Christ as we submit ourselves to You, as we trust You, and as we conform ourselves to this disposition toward You, this disposition toward life and this disposition in prayer. Have mercy on Your people, Father. Be gracious to us and as You're gracious to us, Father, the spirit of our lives, the spirit of our prayer is this, not our will but Thine be done. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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