

**The Secret**  
OF  
**Strength, Serenity, Success**  
FOR THE  
**Christian and the Church**

A Sermon preached by the Rev. J. S. Hogan, D.D.,  
in the First Reformed Church of New Brunswick,  
N. J., September 10, 1916, at the beginning of the 200th  
year of the Church's life.



### NOTE.

The aptness of the following sermon to the occasion which called it forth, its significance to us all in the life of every day and year, and its pertinence to the times in which we live, marked it, in the judgment of a few listeners who happened to meet each other at the close of the service, as one which deserved preservation in a form capable of careful and even repeated reading. It certainly strikes with a firm touch a fundamental and vital note of applied Christianity. These hearers therefore present it to the members of the dear old Church—Let us all read it and ask as we read, What does this sermon mean to me?



John v. 30. *"I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me."*

God has bestowed wonderful gifts upon each of us. Not the least among them is the will. We marvel at its power! By its use man has been enabled to accomplish that which seemed impossible. Like every other faculty, however, it must be trained and controlled. Quite early in life we learn that the wrong use of the will may involve us in trouble. We soon discover that the will of the parent, of the teacher, and of the employer must also be considered. At every stage in life, and in every relation, we find it necessary to use the will with due regard for others.

The failure to do this accounts for the condition of the times. During the past weeks we have noted how men's wills clash. It has been almost impossible to take up our newspapers without being reminded of this state of affairs. We read of strikes and lock-outs, threatened or real, and of the awful carnage continuing among the nations of Europe. There is no question about the strength of the wills in conflict. Men and nations are resolute in standing for their supposed rights. But misdirected will-power is responsible for the present disorder.

Christ answers the question of the day: "How is order to be brought about?" He gives the only remedy. Order will prevail, and peace will be permanent, only when the will of God is supreme. The skeptic and the unbeliever have lately felt justified in their conclusion that there is no such thing as Providence in the govern-

ment of the world. At the best they can only make allowance for an "absentee God," who finds the affairs of men either too trifling or too complicated for Him to manage. Even the christian may have those experiences in his own life when his faith wavers. However sincere he may be in the desire to maintain a strong trust he may feel compelled to ask: "Where is the wisdom, the justice, the profit of these things?" Under all such circumstances as these we do well to come back to the thought of Christ. He knew order could come out of chaos. He taught His followers to pray for it. All of our misgivings may be ended by sincerely offering the petition He put upon our lips: "Thy will be done.—Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." When men's wills are in harmony with God's will, conflict and doubt will cease.

There have been other times in the world's history when there was such apparent chaos. In one such period there lived among men One who made it the supreme object of His life to live in harmony with the will of God. How frequently He referred to this controlling principle in His own life! Repeated reference is made to it in this account given by John, who, perhaps more than any other evangelist, emphasized the deity of Jesus. In this very chapter he relates how Christ refers twice to the subordination of His will to the Father. He has claimed unusual power and authority for Himself. But the marvelous processes which He described were not His apart from the Father. He was very careful to disclaim any independence in His works and words. The will of another was guiding Him in all that He did and said.

His own account of His conduct was given in such statements as these: "Lo, I come to do Thy will. I delight to do Thy will. I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. I am come down from



heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." By such obedience He was refreshed, as by food. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish His work." By the same principle He was guided in the crucial test, when He concluded His prayer: "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done." From such statements we are not to conclude that the will of Christ was contrary to the will of God. He possessed the same innocent and natural feelings of men; He was conscious of pain and pleasure; He had the human aversion to death and desire for life. But all these were put aside if they interfered with the doing of the Father's will. So perfectly did He adhere to this principle that He had supreme satisfaction at the last in declaring: "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given me to do." His life work was ended with the happy consciousness that He had done the will of Him who had sent Him.

Not only did He consider it of importance that He should do the will of God, but He explicitly taught that all others should be guided by the same principle. Very properly we lay great stress upon the importance of acknowledging Jesus as Lord. But let us not forget the test He named: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." Why, our very kinship with Christ rests upon this same ground. On one occasion He was told, "Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak to Thee. But He answered and said unto Him. Who is my mother and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." They thought

the family tie gave them a prior claim upon Him; and the multitude concurred. In his response He declared that by doing the will of God a relationship with Himself is established, which is closer than that formed by earthly ties. Doing the will of God, in the teaching of Christ, became one of the household words of the kingdom of heaven. In His judgment there were but two divisions of mankind,—those who do the will of God, and those who reject and disobey it. It is needless to say to which division He would have all belong. Those who have knowledge of Him become aware of the gracious influences by which He would persuade them to come into harmony with Him who wills their highest good.

It is but natural to inquire what is to be gained by performing any given duty. Three benefits from doing God's will are suggested, which in turn may be suggestive of others: *Strength, Serenity and Service.*

Who does not wish to have a strong will? Without hesitation we conclude that a serious mistake is made by those who would stifle all desire. If there is no ambition, there will be no initiative. It is not by suppressing longing, but by correcting it and holding oneself resolutely to realize it, that progress has been made. By perseverance, patience and strength of will obstacles have been surmounted by leaders in every sphere. Those who have become most noted for their achievements have felt that there was some power supporting and strengthening their wills. The subjection of their wills to a higher will increased their power. The surrender of man's will to God does not weaken, but strengthens it. What a will-power our Lord possessed! In the face of temptation He held steadfastly to His course. He would not turn back; He would not compromise; He could not be discouraged! Martyrs, reformers and statesmen have been able to stand heroically



cally when they believed they were doing the will of God. A few days ago a worthy memorial was presented to our nation. In accepting the gift of the birthplace of one of our greatest citizens, President Wilson spoke again of the strength of Mr. Lincoln's character. His words may well remind us of what Mr. Lincoln himself once said: "The Almighty does make use of human agencies and directly intervenes in human affairs. I have so many evidences of His direction, so many instances where I have been controlled by some other Power than my own will, that I can not doubt that this power comes from above. I am confident that when the Almighty wants me to do, or not to do, a particular thing, He finds a way of letting me know it." It was the conviction that he was doing the will of God that enabled him to withstand threats, opposition and calumny. His will was strong because it was subject to the will of God. For many brave spirits the prayer has been answered: "That ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God."

Serenity is not to be enjoyed by the one who voluntarily opposes God's holy will. What He desires in us and for us, is clearly stated. "The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto repentance; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth; For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." The will of God is opposed to all injustice, oppression, dishonesty, untruthfulness, impurity and all that is sinful. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." The surrendered will is the price of the serene life. Such surrender is one of the most mysterious and majestic acts of which man is capable. How concisely this is stated in the familiar words:

"Our wills are ours, we know not how;  
Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

"We are God's fellow-workers." As such we are to labor in harmony with His will. It seems to me most unfortunate that the usual reference to the will of God associates it with unpleasant circumstances. Too frequently we think of bearing the will of God, suffering according to the will of God, and being resigned to the will of God. We are likely to commiserate our friends, or pity ourselves, for enduring the will of God,—because it can not be escaped. Christ did not speak of it so. He did not talk about bearing it. Let us keep in mind the little word He generally used in His references to His Father's will. "I came to *Do*; I delight to *Do*; it is my meat to *Do*." Acceptable service is rendered by such obedience. Only by doing His will can we coöperate with Him, and receive the needed power for service. Perhaps some of you, during the last few weeks, have been in the woods and seen high up on some trees, a branch with dry twigs and withered leaves. It seemed to you to be a part of the tree. Yet when you looked closer you saw it had been broken off, and was only a piece of dead wood encumbering a living tree. The test of relationship with the tree is life. Proof will not be lacking if we abide in God. Christian graces are bound to adorn the lives of those who do the will of God. Constant reference to His will can lift all labor to the plane of service. It should be consulted at the very beginning of one's life-work. When deciding upon a vocation one naturally inquires about his fitness and aptitude for any special work. But what are talents other than the concrete expression of God's will for a life-work? This is the conception that ennobles labor, and transfigures it into sacred service.

To-day we begin another year of our church work. I have been wondering how we might be assured of success. The year's work will certainly be successful if we can say, collectively and individually,—“I seek not

mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." Shall we not take this word of the Master for our keynote? The coming year promises to be a busy one. In the providence of God we are called upon to plan for the celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of the organization of our church for Christian service. We will be compelled to do our utmost to prepare for that occasion by the proposed renovation of our house of worship. Plans have been made for union evangelistic services this winter on a scale larger than any ever yet attempted in our city. Surely the oldest church ought to take an active part in this work of evangelism. This can be done only as the members of our church heartily coöperate with others. There is also the routine work of the Sunday school and the prayer meeting, and all of the various societies of the church. Is it God's will that His work should be maintained through these? If so, how can any of you fail to ask the question: "What part would God have me take in these?" Let us lay aside all regret for losses, thought of comparison and spirit of rivalry! Let us pray as never before that the Gospel may be magnified in our city, and that God's will may be done by all! Let us strive throughout the year to say with our Lord: "I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me."

The words of Henry Drummond have been a help to me, and I commend them to you: "The end of life is not to do good, although many of us think so. It is not to win souls, although I once thought so. The end of life is to do the will of God. That may be in the line of doing good or winning souls, or it may not. For the individual, the answer to the question, 'What is the end of my life?' is 'To do the will of God, whatever that may be.' Spurgeon replied to an invitation to preach to an exceptionally large audience, 'I have no ambition to preach to ten thousand people, but to do the will of

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God,' and he declined. If we could have no ambition past the will of God, our lives would be successful. The maximum achievement of any man's life, after it is all over, is to have done the will of God. No man or woman can have done any more with a life; no Luther, no Spurgeon, no Wesley, no Melancthon can have done any more with their lives; and a dairy maid or a scavenger can do as much. There is no happiness or success in any life until that principle is taken possession of," and we add, has taken possession of us, in our every act, and every hour.