

The Importance of the Will

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, it does make a difference -- you can sense it on Sunday evening -- if we do some praying before we come, because you did sense Jesus moving among us as John lead. So it just does make all the difference in the world if everyone of us planned to come to the evening services this winter, prayed up before we come, because it really does mean that John, as he leads then, finds a rising of Jesus coming up. So it's just the change is overwhelming.

I'd like to try to talk about the importance of the will in our own Christian lives. And I think I could symbolize it by an Old Testament event, if you'd like to turn to it in Joshua 6:1. It's a story that we all know of Jericho. "Now Jericho was shut up from within and from without because of the people of Israel; none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said to Joshua, 'See, I have given into your hand Jericho, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; and on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up every man straight before him.'"

So Joshua of course, gave the instructions. And then if you look at Verse 20 you find what happened, "So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city." Now, when had God given the city into their hands?

Well, look back at the beginning of 6:2, "And the LORD said to Joshua, 'See, I have given into your hand Jericho, with its king and mighty men of valor.'" "I've already done it. But actually, what I have already done will only be manifested so that the walls fall flat, when you exercise your will to walk around the city seven times." Now actually, walking around the city, even if you had very heavy feet and thousands of elephants with you, wouldn't shake the ground enough to make the walls fall down. So it wasn't the walking around the city that caused the walls to fall down. It was exercising their wills to do what God told them, and walk around the city seven times. And then God manifested what he had already given into their hands, Jericho. That's the place of the will, in our lives. It really is.

Now I'll try to explain it to you, because it's something that God has made new to me again. The difficulty that all of us have in saying what we really believe at the office, or saying what we really believe at class, or in school, or saying what we really believe in front of our friends -- about all kinds of things. I mean, we all like to think it's a "95 Theses" like Martin Luther. But usually we aren't all faced with proclaiming our faith. We're often faced with saying what we really think of a certain situation in the office, or what we really think of a certain situation in the nation. And we know it isn't pleasant or popular in the eyes of the other people, and so we keep quiet. Or, somebody makes a dirty joke; it's putrid; we don't like it; we know we should say what we think, but we don't want to be made a fool of.

The reason we don't do, what we should do, is because of what we said last Sunday. Most of us here are absolutely slaves to other people's opinions, of us. We are. We just are desperately concerned -- in fact, you might almost say with some of us it's a mania. We have almost a mania about what other people think of us. And if we think we're going to destroy our reputation in their eyes, or look a little bit square and not so much of a swinger, then we will keep quiet. And you know, we have often tried to break that. Even if we're children of God, we've tried to break it. And we've said to ourselves, "I'm going to do it. I'm going to say what I think." But we catch somebody's eye, some of our peers, and we see the way they're looking at us. And somehow all our determination crumbles inside us.

It's the same thing if you get into the whole sex thing. It's the same thing exactly. We're absolutely determined that we will love this person as a person, and that we will not love this person's body. We will love this person first and foremost, and we will respect this person as we would our own mother or our own father. And we are determined to do that. But then we get close to the loved one's body, or we get close to the other person, and all our resolutions go out the window.

And the reason is the same, you know. It's the same reason as we discussed last Sunday. Most of us here have little personalities that are enslaved to the outside stimuli that come through the eyes, or through the ears, or often through our minds and emotions. We are just enslaved to what people think of us, to what certain experiences will do for us in the way of happiness, or to what certain things will do for us in the way of security. And that's why so many of us cry, "The good that I would I cannot do." The reason is our equipment is working the wrong way around. And what we need is that equipment changed. And that is the miracle that we talked about last Sunday.

Loved ones, there are many of us here who know we have had our sins forgiven. And you know why you believe that. You believe that because, you say, Jesus has died for you. And you have your sins forgiven now, but you're having difficulty walking free of those sins in your own life. The reason is you haven't really realized in what way Jesus died for you. So, I want to put you once more again on that verse -- and I'll get back to Joshua you'll find, if you just bear with me. It's 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all..." And that's what so many of us here tonight, believe. We believe Jesus has died for all of us and that's why God is willing to forgive us. But do you see the next clause? "Therefore, all have died."

And the fact is that, that personality of yours that is enslaved to what other people think of it, and that is enslaved to the stimulation that comes to you from other people's physical appearances -- that personality of yours died with Jesus before the foundation of the world. That's what that means, loved ones. God destroyed you and remade you in his Son 1900 years ago -- maybe 3000 or 4000 years ago. And that's why he's willing to forgive you your sins, because he treats you in the light of that. He treats you as a person who is not a little monkey to be fooled with by the world. But he treats you as a holy saint, who operates because of your love of God. That's right. God treats you as that.

That's what that verse in Psalm 103 means, "He does not deal with you according to your sins." He deals with you according to the change that he has made in you in Jesus. In fact, in Jesus, God, you remember, reconciled the world to himself. Do you know when the walls of Jericho fell down? They fell down in the "Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world." That's true.

Every blessing, every miracle in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, every good thing that has happened in our lives, happened in the "Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world." God there, destroyed everything that would oppose his will, in his Son, on Calvary, in his own heart, in eternity, billions of years before the world was ever created. And all we have to do is believe that, and then exercise our wills in accordance with it. And the power of that death begins to flow into our own lives.

And that's what happened around Jericho. When they walked around the walls seven times, they let loose the power of Calvary on those solid walls. When the disciples did what Jesus told them, and set out companies of people in 50s, then that let loose the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, whereby God had taken the loaves and fishes of the little guy, put them into Jesus from before the foundation of the world, and destroyed them and remade them enough for 5,000. And when they set out the companies of 50, that power was released into that bread and into those fish.

And it's the same in our lives, so many of us, you see, think, "Oh, that's right, we believe your diagram – I'll show you my diagram so you know what you believe. "We believe your diagram! It's a great diagram! I'm bored with it, but it's a great diagram."

[Pastor shows his diagram of the personality that consists of 3 concentric rectangles. The outer rectangle is the 'body'. The next smaller one is the 'soul'. The smallest one inside is the 'spirit'. The basic diagram shows God's Holy Spirit above the 3 rectangles, and an arrow from the Holy Spirit into our 'spirit', and then an arrow from our spirit to our 'soul', and then an arrow from our 'soul' to our 'body' and finally an arrow from our 'body' out to the 'world', shown on the diagram as below the 'body' outer rectangle -- The diagram is actually more detailed than that. Inside the 'spirit' are 'Communion', 'Intuition' and 'Conscience', and the arrow from the Holy Spirit goes first to 'Communion', from there to 'Intuition', and from there to 'Conscience'. Then the 'soul' is similarly divided into 'Will', 'Mind', and 'Emotions', and the arrow from the 'spirit' to the 'soul' is actually from 'Conscience' to 'Will', with a note "Obeys". The sequence in the 'soul', then, is from 'Will' to 'Mind', and from 'Mind' to 'Emotions', and from there out to the 'body'.]

"And we believe what you say, that we used to operate that way. [Pastor shows the diagram again, but with an overlay that shows the arrows going in the opposite direction, from the 'world' into the 'body' and from the 'body' to the 'Emotions', to the 'Mind', and to the 'Will'.] And we believe now that we live by the security, significance, and happiness that we got from things, and from people, and from events, and we live back this way. And [we believe] that God destroyed all that on Calvary. [Pastor adds another overlay of a big cross covering the whole mess.] And that that's crucified, and now he treats us as people who live this way, [Pastor removes the 2 overlays back to the original] the way we were meant to, by God's love coming through our spirits, expressing itself through our wills, and minds, and emotions, and out to the world. We believe that God treats us like that and now we understand."

And here's the trick, "We understand that all we've got to do is take our miserable selves, (that really operate like this,) [Pastor puts back the overlay that shows the personality flowing the wrong direction] and we've got to twist them, and kick them, and thump them, and beat them until they're really like that." [Pastor takes the overlay off so it shows God's original design.]

That's it! That's it! And you know, I think that's where a lot of you take the salvation and you make it a 'rope around your neck'. It's like Joshua saying, "Yeah, you've given this city into my

hands. Well I know that's just a metaphor, Lord. I know I have to get the old guns, and the cannons up here, and try to dynamite these wretched walls myself." It's like doing that. It's like saying, "Lord, I know that my old self was crucified with Christ. I know that I was swung right around, but I know I have to will it into existence by my own power."

And God is saying to us, "No, you haven't! That's not why I'm telling you to do things! I'm telling you to do things so that the power of what I have already done in you -- because, believe me, you are new! You are changed around! -- so that that power will manifest itself in your life."

But you know what we do? We say, "No, Lord! That's not it! You've got it wrong! We understand that you've done this to us in Christ and unless we do it like that ourselves, in our own life, we're not saved." And God says, "You're dumb-dumbs! That's not it at all! I have put you into my son Jesus! I've destroyed you and remade you! Believe me, I wouldn't let you live another moment in my world if you were like you used to be! I'm only letting you live in my world for these 70 years, because I changed you. I destroyed you and remade you, so that you can live off my love, and be satisfied with that alone. I have done that. I've forgiven you. I've accepted you. You're my child. Even if you don't live this way, you're still my child until these 70 years are up. Then, you can exercise condemnation over yourself at that moment of death. But up to that moment, you're my child, even if you curse me at this moment. 'I have commended my love towards you, even while you're yet sinners.' Now, I want you simply to believe that. And then I want you to exercise my will as I guide you so that the power of that can manifest itself in your life."

Now that's it, loved ones. And you see it frees your will. It gets you out of this agony that many of you get yourselves into. You say, "I lost my temper. That means I haven't accepted my crucifixion with Christ." Big deal! It doesn't much matter whether you accept it or not. As far as God is concerned it's done. And that's the reason he loves you with all his heart. That's the reason he "does not deal with you according to your sins" at this moment. That's why he gives you so many things. That's why he answers your prayers, because he treats you as a person who has been utterly changed and remade. And so he asks you to believe what is actually true. And then he says, "Now, I'm going to direct you to do some things with your will, and as you do that..." And you tend to say, "I'll be saved?" He says, "No, you're saved already. Don't say that. As you do this, you'll manifest the power of this in your life. And you'll begin to find you're reclaiming ground for me."

Now loved ones, do you see it? Do you see that it's the same as that old situation with Jericho? The Jericho city had been destroyed; the power of that matter to stand had been destroyed in Jesus from before the foundation of the world. The walking around the wall the six times or seven times had nothing to do with the walls falling. All it had to do with was the submission of the will to what God told them to do. Then, as a result of that, he manifested -- what might have been an utterly different power altogether. In fact, it must have been, because I'm sure you've walked around things six or seven times and they haven't fallen, have they? So obviously, it was a different power completely that God manifested.

Now, it's the same in our lives, you see. And so what we need to do is come before the Lord and say, "Father, I thank you that I have been remade in Jesus. I believe that. I accept that. Your word says that our old self was crucified with Christ. I thank you that that's true. Your word says that if we died with Christ we shall also live with him. I believe that's true. Your word says if any man is in Christ he is a new creation. And your word says that all of us died when Christ died. So Lord, I believe I'm new. I believe you raised me up and made me clean. Now, show

me, Holy Spirit, what you want me to submit to you, in my will, so that you can manifest some of that power in my life.”

And loved ones, you may have a dreadful problem with bad temper. And God may not ask you to submit your will on the issue of temper at all. He may have something else that is actually far deeper, or far different. And he’s asking you, “Will you forget that you have any rights? Will you accept that I have destroyed you in my Son? And I want to show you the new person you are. So I want you to visit this woman who is sick this week.”

And you’ll have a tendency to say, “What does walking around the walls of Jericho to do with getting the walls down?” “What has visiting this sick woman to do with my wretched temper?”

And God will say, “I have already taken care of all that. I’m asking you to submit your will on this issue so that I can manifest the power that I have already released into your life.”

Now loved ones, do you see it? The importance of the will in the Christ-like life, is to let the power of this miracle, that took place on Calvary, to allow that power to come through you. But, God alone can manifest that power. You can’t do it. And he will manifest it as you submit your will to him.

Now of course, this takes it out of the realm completely of your own salvation being under your control. And it isn’t, loved ones! It isn’t! Your salvation isn’t under your control. Here’s the other terrible fact: the redemption of your personality isn’t under your control. So, you may be sitting here this evening and say, “Boy, the thing that spoils my witness most is my covetousness.” Well, that may be your opinion, but God knows himself what he’s going to deal with you about. And it may be nothing to do with covetousness.

So, the position of a Christian who wants to enter into the victorious life has to be, “Lord, I thank you. I thank you that I’m good for nothing. You wiped me out in Jesus. You recreated me. I thank you that I’m new and recreated. Now Lord, show me what you want me to do, and I’ll do it.” But it’s in virtue of the fact that the sting has been taken out of sin on Calvary.

Now loved ones, that’s the whole approach -- if you’d like to look at it in Colossians. It’s the apostolic presentation of victory that you get in Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae. It’s Colossians 3:1, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” “Believe that,” Paul says.

Then, “Put to death...” It’s a detail, just an incidental detail of this. “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature.” You’ve put it off already. “With its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

Now loved ones, Satan comes to you and says, “You haven’t put off the whole nature,” and your answer to him is, “Did Christ die for all of us?” And he has to answer, “Yes, he did.” And your question

to him is, "Then did all of us die?" And he has to answer, "Yes, you did." Then you answer, "That was when my old nature was put off. I thank God that it has been put off. Now I've simply to exercise my will in the light of that."

Now loved ones, let's look at some verses in regard to the will and apply that. Luke 12:34. Let's trust the Holy Spirit to give us the right words, and light for each of us to see it. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." That is the thing that you treasure most. That shows where your heart is, or where your will is. And so you see in Verse 32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

So, you lose the good job with the good salary. And you find the anxiety growing and developing inside your emotions. At that moment, God expects you to look up to him and say, "Lord, I thank you that the old me that used to exist before Calvary, depended utterly for its security on this good job. And indeed, it was utterly brainwashed with the idea that you get a good job, and then you go to a better job, and a better job, and a better job. And the old self thought that that was the greatest security you could have. But Lord, I thank you that I was crucified with Christ, and I thank you that I'm a new creation. And I thank you Lord, that my treasure is in you who will withhold no good thing from your own Son, and I am part of your Son. And Lord, I thank you for this. And I thank you for this situation, Lord. I thank you that I have lost this good job that I treasured so much. I know you wouldn't let me lose anything unless you wanted to teach me some new liberty and freedom. So Lord, I thank you for that. And now I trust you Holy Spirit to show me what I've to do, how I've to exercise my will in the light of this."

That's it, loved ones. You bound over the top of it by exercising your faith in what has happened to you in Jesus. You don't struggle with the thing and say, "I'm not going to worry. I'm not going to worry. I'm not going to worry. I'm not anxious. I'm not anxious. I'm not anxious. I'm not anxious." You don't fight it that way. You bound over it. You exercise your faith in the change that has been wrought in you in Jesus. And then you obey what God tells you to obey.

Now what you do in that situation determines where your treasure is. And don't come around the back of yourself and conk yourself in the back of your head and say, "Oh, you mean if my treasures is in the job then I'm not saved?" You are saved; you're in Jesus; you've been changed. But what you're dumbly doing is failing to take Jericho. That's it. You're failing to take ground and experience victory in your life and provision in your life that God has available for you. That's it.

And that's why many of us, when we come to a situation like the loss of a good job, do not enter then into victory, and do not enter into deliverance even in our own finances. Because, we fall down under the thing, instead of accepting that God is showing us what he did to us in Jesus, and bounding over it and saying, "Lord, I thank you that you have provision." And because we don't exercise our wills in that, because we don't walk around the walls of Jericho seven times, the power that God has already available for us, the money that he has already available for us, is not manifested in our lives. But that's what we lose, loved ones.

Now, I agree with you, if we keep on failing to exercise our wills, day-after-day, and year-after-year, eventually we become perverted into models of Satan that eventually have to be permanently destroyed because we would destroy the universe. But at this time, God is so gracious

to you and to me. "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquities." He treats us continually as men and women who are in Christ and therefore are new creations. And what you and I lose by not believing that, and not exercising our will in the light of that, is the provision that he has for us in victory -- the particular Jericho that he wants us to take.

Here's another verse loved ones, in Luke 18:23. "But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich." Now, this is the story, you remember, that begins in Verse 18, the rich young ruler. "And a ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, 'All these I have observed from my youth.' And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack.'" And then Jesus picked the one thing that he was concerned about in that man's will. "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich."

You have a dear girl, or a dear guy. Or we husbands and wives have a loved one that is just in the wrong position in our hearts. And God sees that, and he sees that here is an area where we are not living in the victory that he has wrought for us. You remember that verse of that hymn, or that line of that hymn, "I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." Now Jesus knows that the sweetest face here in this room, the sweetest husband or the sweetest wife, the most beautiful girl and the most handsome guy, will fall into dust and ashes in a very, very few years. And he knows that, even while they look good and they're alive here on earth, they're nothing compared with the beauty of Jesus himself who made them.

And the Father knows that about you and me. He knows that we're wasting our heart, and the total dependence for our happiness, on something that is a lie, that will fall into ruination in a few years' time. And his heart bleeds for us as he sees that -- especially, when all that part of us was wiped out in Jesus and remade. And so really there's a part of us that knows that true beauty is God, and true tenderness is his dear loving heart, and true happiness and satisfaction is our friendship with the one who owns the universe. He knows all that, and so he picks that part in your life.

He knows with you, rich young ruler that you are, it's not money. He knows it's this person, this girl that you're determined to marry, this guy that you're determined to marry, this husband, or this wife that you spend so much of your time trying to please. He knows that. And so he lovingly separates you from them in some way. Even with us husbands and wives -- I think husbands and wives know here -- God has a way of separating you from what you're getting from your wife, or what you're getting from your husband, to separate you to show you, "No, this is wrong. This is some poor substitute for something more beautiful. You're loving this person in an unloving way. You're wanting, and desiring, and lusting for this person. You're not really loving this person in a way that blesses them." And he knows that, and he chooses that one thing. And he says, "Sell that! And you'll have all the love that you want, and enough to spare for this one that you 'say' you love."

And that's a crucial moment, loved ones, in our lives. And at that moment God calls us to look up to him and say, "Lord God, I know that this miserable old self of mine could not rise to that, because I am set on this girl or this guy. And I just think that this person will make me utterly and completely happy. But Lord, I thank you that I was crucified with you. And Father, I thank you

for that. And I believe that. And I believe that I was dead with you Lord Jesus. And Lord Jesus, I want even to experience what you felt when you died to the love of your mother, as she looked at you on the cross. Lord, I thank you that I died with you. And I thank you for that, that I'm changed. And I thank you Father, that I am fit to live off your love. So Lord, thank you for that. Your love is enough for me."

And take your eyes off the 'riches' that God has asked you to 'sell'. Take your eyes off the dear wife, or the dear husband, or the dear guy, or the dear girl. Look away from them completely. And look up to God and say, "Holy Spirit, what would you like me to do in the way of exercising my will, so that you can manifest the power that you wrought in Jesus through his resurrection."

And at that moment, God may say to you, "Well, I would like you to write a letter to this friend of yours. I'd like you to write a letter, a letter of affection, and interest, and care, and concern."

And you may be tempted to say, "Why should I walk round these walls of Jericho? What has that to do with bringing this city down? Why should I write this letter? What has that to do with my desire to marry this girl?" And at that moment, God will ask you to exercise your will in this apparently irrelevant way. And if you do loved ones, the power of Calvary will be manifested in your life in a way that I can't explain, and don't know. But you will find a power of love coming in, that will bound over the whole thing -- surround everything. And maybe you'll never marry that guy; maybe you'll never marry that girl; but you won't miss them. God will provide you with a power of love that transforms your heart above all that.

So loved ones, that's some of it. That's poorly said. I feel helpless, and hopeless, and terrible at describing this. But that's part of the victory, loved ones. It's part of what is possible to us. And the importance of our wills is not to bring about our salvation, but to manifest the power that God has already created in Jesus, in us, and can begin to express itself in this life.

And if you say to me, "Oh well, now brother, haven't our wills something to do?" Yes, yes! The biggie! The biggie! That's the important thing for our wills. The biggie is, "Do you believe Jesus has died for you and that you have died with him?" And once you do that then your whole attitude to God is, "Lord, manifest this in whatever way you please, I'm willing for it." That's the big surrender of the will. But after that big surrender, it's all a matter of exercising the will according to God's apparently irrelevant directions.

Okay, I'll keep quiet now. Any questions? There must be lots of questions because that was terrible. But still, any questions loved ones?

See, the amazing thing is that God deals with you as being like Jesus! And that's unbelievable! God deals with you as being like Jesus at this moment!

I didn't think I was that bad that you couldn't even ask questions. Okay, shall we pray?

Dear Lord, we thank you for your dear Word. And we thank you Lord, for mysteries that are too deep for intellectual explanation. But Lord, we thank you for this mighty fact that all of us here who have deserved to go to hell, went to hell when Jesus went there! Thank-you that, dear Lord Jesus, when you descended into hell, and you cried, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" you did it because you had all of us inside you with all our evil, and all our miserable enslaved personalities. Oh Lord Jesus, we thank you. We thank you for that.

We thank you that "thou hast bled and died for us." And we thank you Lord, that because of that, our dear Father regards us as having paid our price. We've paid the penalty. And dear Lord, you don't exact any further penalty from us. You've exercised your wrath upon us in Jesus. And now throughout this life you treat us as men and women who have been raised from the dead. And oh Lord, if you treat us that way, we know we are that. And Lord, we know we can believe that. And we can begin to exercise our wills as you tell us.

Lord, we thank you that it delivers us from legalism and from our own attempts to be good, and enables us to put ourselves in your hands and say, "Lord, what will thou have me to do?"

Dear Lord, I pray for each brother and sister here this night, that as you begin to reveal to them definite things, that they've to exercise their wills upon, that they will do it according to your directions, and not according to their own thinking or their own wisdom.

We would commit ourselves to you, dear Lord Jesus, to experience more of the mystery of your cross and resurrection in our lives through this coming week, for your glory. Amen.

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