

A Service written by Rev David Speed

Understanding the will of the Lord

Hymn – StF 82

Oh Lord, my God
When I, in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands
 have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe
 displayed

*Then sings my soul,
 my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art,
 how great Thou art
Then sings my soul,
 my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art,
 how great Thou art*

When through the woods and forest
 glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the
 trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain
 grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle
 breeze:

Then sings my soul ...

And when I think that God, His Son not
 sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the cross, my burden gladly
 bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

Then sings my soul ...

When Christ shall come, with shout of
 acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my
heart
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou
art

Then sings my soul ...

Prayers

Great and wonderful God,
We come before you in humility,
 In awe,
 In faith,
 in hope,
 in love,
 in worship,
In your mercy,
 Hear our prayer

We come to praise you,
 To bless you,
 To adore you,
 To acknowledge you,
 To salute you,
 To thank you,
In your mercy,
 Hear our prayer

We come recognising your power,
 Your Authority,
 Your wisdom,
 Your faithfulness,
 Your goodness
 Your Love
In your mercy,
 Hear our prayer

We come confessing our weakness,
 Our unworthiness,
 Our Faults
 Our Failings
 Our faithfulness
 Our lack of love
In your mercy,
 Hear our prayer

We come seeking your mercy,
 Your guidance
 Your Strength
 Your inspiration,
In your mercy,
 Hear our prayer

We commit ourselves to your service,
Your purpose
Your people,
Your world
In your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Great and wonderful God,
We come to you now in the name of Christ
Receive the worship we offer this day.
In your mercy,
Hear our prayer
Amen

Nick Fawcett

Reading Ephesians 5 v 15-20

Hymn – StF 370

1 Breathe on me, breath of God:
fill me with life anew,
that I may love as you have loved
and do as you would do.

2 Breathe on me, breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with yours
to do and to endure.

3 Breathe on me, breath of God;
fulfil my heart's desire,
until this earthly part of me
glows with your heavenly fire.

4 Breathe on me, breath of God;
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
of your eternity.

Talk – Understanding the will of the Lord

Did you know that one verse in the Bible says, 'there is no God?' Actually, it says, "The fool has said there is no God". That's says a bit about putting the Bible into context, but the Old Testament is talking about wisdom and foolishness. Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool has said there is no God". Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". The writer of Ephesians knew his Scriptures and uses both words in the passage we've talked about. He writes. "Understand what is the Lord's will".

I think that means, "Understand how to live".
And "Understand how to be happy".

UNDERSTAND HOW TO LIVE.

Understand how to live.
Seek Jesus.
It's not always easy.

The writer, we think it's Paul, was writing to people in Ephesus. Now Ephesus had a Temple to the goddess, Diana. There was quite an industry around her. Yes, she was worshipped, and craft makers made images to her. These craftsmen would have provided work for many others. We're told a bit about this in Acts. When Paul preached Jesus in Ephesus, there was a riot. He was rivalling Diana. He was threatening their living. He would impoverish them. They couldn't take that risk.

They found Jesus a threat to them. They could not allow his representatives to speak.

Our society tends to believe in money, and our right to spend it as we choose. It tends to believe that only some people have an opinion. Those who believe in Christ tend not to be allowed theirs. There are some who would like to shut us up if our beliefs don't coincide with theirs. So much seems against us. It's hard to seek God in such a world.

Yet why should we need other people's approval for what we believe. During the days of restriction, I tried to give people social distance. It was a narrow street in Nuthall. I saw someone twenty-five yards away so I stopped in a driveway to let him go by. He passed by, seemed to think, and then stopped. He said, "I haven't got COVID, you know". I said, "I'm only following the restrictions".

He said, "There are no laws".

I replied, "You go your way, mate. I'll go mine".

If others do not believe what we do, why can we not say, "You go your way, I'll go mine"? Have we not found that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"? We will go His way, even if they choose another. Paul writes, here, "Do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is". The alternative to following the Lord's will is to be foolish. I think we know that to go through life posing how important we are, how we have the smart ideas, how we know the right people, is futile because one day we have to let go of this life. Someone once said, "Life

can only be lived one way and that is God's Way".

Put yourself in the places where God can influence you. You know what this means, worship like you are doing now, prayer, which is so important to so many, Bible reading, and God will inform your understanding and mine so we will make better decisions. Let yourself be a face of Christ's love to others.

Paul's right to say watch what you say, think and do, but if we're a face of love to others we shall be able to do this automatically. More, we can view what they do in a more understanding way rather than simply judging them. It will mean taking a stand for what is just and right, standing up for the oppressed, but seeking to do this in as loving a way as possible. Love does not just see people behaving badly. It sees why they do so. Put yourself in the places where Christ can make you more like Himself. The more we do this, the more we feel we know what living is all about.

Understand what is the Lord's will to learn how to live.

But, also, HOW TO BE HAPPY

Find happiness that lasts.

As I look around everyone today, I must offer some strong advice, "Do not get drunk with wine".

I'm not suggesting you would. Sometimes, we seek happiness in that which only lasts for a time. Buying and getting things, as many holidays as we can, what we can do next to improve the house, meals out. If our whole lives are spent doing this, then we might persistently show a smiling face but often there's an emptiness inside. Before Sir Cliff Richard became a Christian, he enjoyed his career as a pop star. The only trouble is his act only lasted an hour or two, and when he got back home, he felt empty.

There is a very old saying, "Anyone who rejects God's will is like a leaky ship on a stormy sea,
Is like an eagle caught in a trap, is like an apple tree that never blossoms.
Anyone who obeys God's will is like the golden rays of the summer sun,
Is like a silver chalice overflowing with wine,
Is like a beautiful bride ready for love"

Paul says, "Instead of spending your while lives pursuing things that don't last, find the joys that do". Strangely, many of these will centre around God. When you thank God for what he's given you, and maybe we've found out a bit more about that these last eighteen months, then we can have the singing in our hearts without the hangover the next morning. We have seen the beauty of that which comes for nothing. We have appreciated the value of friendship. We have seen that God can use the bad that happens for good.

Someone who was depressed said that singing made a real difference to her. If singing to God gives you the joy without the hangover, why not? If you do so because you think that there's a lot to thank Him for than you don't need to build your life on things which don't last but on Him who does. In the early days, Christians used to sing to each other with sacred songs of what they knew from scripture or their own heart.

Some confuse finding new experiences through drink or drugs with finding new meaning. Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit" if you want that meaning. The old scholar, Erasmus, said, "This is a pleasant kind of drunkenness". God gives new meaning and enough excitement without the need for intoxication of whatever kind.

Jesus has given us our interests. He doesn't tell us to get rid of them, like the person who said, "I used to go to the theatre and cinema. Then I got religious". Sometimes, He might encourage us to redirect them. There was a lot of drunkenness and bawdy signing in John Wesley's day. It was almost the only enjoyment some people would have. But instead of the drinking cup there, the early Methodists gave new followers the loving cup for what was called the love feasts even if they were bread and water rather than bread and wine. For the bawdy songs there were rousing hymns. A voice inside us cries, 'boring'. It's wrong. You can get as much enjoyment, here, as you could before. In fact, more, as you feel you're in touch with the one at the heart of living, the Lord Himself.

We should see the things we enjoy as our oases but not our homes. Our lives were meant for something bigger than pleasures.

I remember reading a book called, "Enjoyment that Endures". A Jesus based life gives us this. It shows us how to live and how to be happy. Be confident that this is what will happen when we seek to understand what is the will of the Lord.
Amen

Prayers – of thanksgiving and intercession

Let us pray,
Lord, in our best moments we come to understand your will. There are many who have lost confidence. We pray for those who are afraid to go out, and who are afraid to come to Church that they may know your loving wish for them.

We pray for those who are fearful of the present and for the future, for each new statistic fills them with worry. Help them to understand your wishes for them.

We pray for those who cannot see beyond themselves. Help them to live their best lives, and to discover the release of following you.

We pray for those whom we know who are sick, lonely, and who feel unnoticed, that they may know love, and that it comes from you.

We pray for those facing wildfires, floods and the effects of Climate Change. We pray that we also may do what is necessary to secure a future for our planet.

We pray for those threatened by the civil war in Afghanistan, especially remembering those who were interpreters for the British Forces, who have not yet been enabled to return.

We pray for situations of unresolved tension in the world, remembering Israel, and Palestine.

We pray to have the faith that violence, deceit, and injustice will not have the last words in life. You, alone, have the last word.

We pray for others and for ourselves in that faith. In Jesus Name.
Amen

Hymn – StF 78

Give thanks with a grateful heart
Give thanks to the Holy One
Give thanks because He's given
Jesus Christ, His Son
Give thanks with a grateful heart
Give thanks to the Holy One
Give thanks because He's given
Jesus Christ, His Son

And now let the weak say, I am strong
Let the poor say, I am rich
Because of what the Lord has done for us

And now let the weak say, I am strong
Let the poor say, I am rich
Because of what the Lord has done for us
Give thanks

Blessing - We share the words of the Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all – evermore.

Amen