

20250209_IWillNotLeaveThee

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Preacher: Roger Phipps

- [0 : 00] Father, thank you for gathering us together. Thank you for giving us your word, which instructs and encourages us.
- Most of all, of course, we thank you for that great plan of salvation, your grace and love, which caused you to take on flesh and carry our sin to the cross.
- Yes, we now are thankful as well for the privilege of bringing all our requests to you.
- And so we bring Genevieve and Marvis and Susan and Julie, all of these folks and more to you.
- You know our frames that we're dust, and we're thankful for that. You created. You know our weakness. And so, Lord, we trust you for the outcome.
- [1 : 08] We ask, Lord, that as we look into your word this morning and discuss your word, that you would instruct us, give us insight.
- It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen. Okay, so, we are, we're at the well in Haran with Abraham's, this is chapter 24.
- We're at the well in Haran with Abraham's servant. And he prays. And what does he pray for?
- What's he want the sign about? Well, that's the specific sign he asks about the woman who comes.
- What's she going to do? She's going to give him a drink, and she's going to, she's going to draw for the camels, and this is going to be the sign.
- [2 : 17] Then I will know what? She's the one that God has chosen. That's the important part there.
- Now, he wants to know God's will for Isaac, doesn't he?
- That's what he's praying for. Is that out of line? That's a real question. Is that, is that wrong? Is it wrong to want to know God's will for something?
- Do I want to know God's will? Well, sometimes. Generally speaking, as long as it doesn't interfere with what I want, right?
- But, should we not want to know God's will? Now, what kinds of things do I want to know God's will about?
- [3 : 33] Okay. Everything, that's a nice, encompassing answer. Now, let's specify a couple of them. Let's give a couple of examples.
- examples. No one has an example. Well, reading his word, but what do I, that's where I get his will, maybe.
- Challenges. Okay, there's one. Choosing my wife, or choosing your husband, right? I mean, that's one of the, that's kind of important.
- Careers. What am I going to do with my life? What am I going to do? Uh, how am I going to make a living?

Where am I going to make a living? Okay. Do I want to know God's will in that? So, that's where we are. Now, years ago, and, and we still get the public, we get the publication here, our daily bread.

[4 : 56] And, some years ago, radio, well, it started out with radio Bible class, and became Discover the Word. Same organization.

They had a radio broadcast, that was a round table discussion, and, I told you last week, that, God willing, we were going to play a little bit of that.

And, I will, I'll start the play. Now, if you have something that, you have a question on, or that you want to, interject, get your hand up, please, and I'll stop the play.

Okay? Are we ready? And, it has to do with this subject. That's why I chose this. Okay. Maybe I will.

All of us have decisions to make, and, some of the decisions seem like big decisions, some seem to be small, but we have to make them constantly, and, we'd like to know, what God's will is.

[6 : 27] What I think is striking, is that when you turn to the Bible, you do not have a passage, as far as I know, that is devoted to telling us, how to know God's will.

That is, as far as I can tell, there is no passage, that the biblical writer, is involved in, in which he is trying, to tell the people, who are reading, how they can, know the will of God, for many of these things, about whether they should, move, or whether they should buy a house.

Now, now, Hatton, what you're saying, is method, not, the Bible doesn't tell us, how, to find that out, because the Bible, certainly does give us, instruction, on things, that are the will of God, Somebody else, come back here, and say, what the whole Bible, from beginning to end, is telling us, what the will, the desire, the thoughts, and designs of God, are for our life.

So really, what you are saying, is that there isn't, a methodology, spelled out, for us. Yes, when you think, of the kinds of decisions, that we're talking about, some, dealing with, should I commit, adultery, should I steal, people, you know, the Bible's pretty clear, on those, decisions, but it's the kinds, of decisions, that involve, well, location, and vocation, a young person, in high school, has to decide, whether or not, she's going to college, and if she goes to college, what she's going to major in, and if she, decides in the major, what courses to take, and then, someplace, she has to decide, whether or not, she's going to get married, a young man, has to decide, if he's going to stay, in his hometown, or he's going to move, I mean, those decisions, that deal with, location, and vocation, are the ones, that often press in on us, and how you get the, know the will of God, for those things, you would think, the Bible would have a passage, telling you exactly, how you should go about, finding that out, and it's surprising, since it's the question, that many, many people ask today, and you would think, that the Bible, would have an answer to it, and yet in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel, were told by God, where to go, when to stop, when to start, the priests, had means of, of directly, answering a request of God, and so you can't say, that the whole Bible, does not speak to it, there's a sense, in which the New Testament, doesn't speak, it spoke to, the needs of a particular people, in a particular place, at a particular time, didn't, and even in that case, you don't have, a passage in the Old Testament, that tells,

Sam, who is carrying, the left rear tent peg, of the tabernacle, whether or not, he ought to buy, a horse, or whether he ought, to buy a wagon, the guidance you had, was for the entire people, just as in the New Testament, you have guidance, for the church, as the church, but the, they were left, to making the decisions, just as you and I, would make the decisions, unless you lose your donkey, and then on occasion, they look for an oracle, they look for a, that's true, that's true, it's just that, as you look at that passage, you get no guidance, today, for how to make that decision, okay, when he said, unless you lose your donkey, about what is he referring, he's talking about Saul, the sign that was given to Saul, you know, Saul's donkey left, he went, and looked for, a sign, and was told, how to find the donkey, so, that's the reference, to that, it's, it's not that it, when, when Mark says, unless you lose your donkey, and then you're, you're given that, but the, but what Haddon, then, mentions, is that, even that, does not give you, a, what do I want to say, a direct, information for us today, as to how to find it.

[10 : 31] All of us have decisions to make, and, some of the decisions, seem like big decisions, some seem to be small, but we have them, we make them, constantly, and, we'd like to know, what God's will is.

What I think is striking, is that when you turn to the Bible, you do not have a passage, as far as I know, that is devoted, to telling us, how to know, God's will, that is as far as I can tell, there is no, all of us have decisions, that started over, didn't it?

And, some of the decisions, seem like big decisions, some seem to be small, but we have them, we make them, constantly, and, we'd like to know, what God's will is.

What I think is striking, is that when you turn to the Bible, you do not have, I shouldn't have done anything. I had missed everything, and it was a one, I'm sorry. because, it didn't come with a photograph, and a name, right?

That's right. It's a day, for how to make that decision. When you were, in your teens, did you ever wonder about, whom you would marry?

[11 : 40] Sure. Oh my word, yes. What did you wonder about? Well, first of all, who it would be. And how do you decide, how do you tell, how do you, which one is the right one?

That's right. Well, if you had the question, which one is the right one, you were way ahead of me, I wondered if there was anybody out there, that was going to respond, and we'd go to summer camps, and one of the questions, that we would ask a speaker, would be something like, how do you know, who you're supposed to marry?

And what amazed me, as I look back, is that the speakers, would give us answers. One that would be very popular, would be, God chooses best, for those who leave the choice with him.

Well, that sounds pious, but what does it mean? Well, it's got truth in it too, doesn't it? The shirt has truth. But, but it wasn't much helped me, in my teens, because, it didn't come with a photograph, and a name, right?

That's right. It was too broad a principle, that is, how would I know, this person? You know, I was willing for God to choose, but how would I know?

[12 : 51] You know, that also implies, that God has a choice, that there is, a very specific person out there, that God wants me to marry, and I better be very careful, that I make that decision correctly.

That's right. That was implied in the answer, wasn't it? Or at least in the question, and the answer, that there would be one person, who would come along, and I didn't know, if she carried a big Schofield Bible, or had a bun in her hair, or she'd look a certain way, that never got spelled out, but yes, that was, you're right, that was the implication, that I had to make that choice, and boy, if I chose the wrong person, I'd spend the rest of my life, living with somebody, I shouldn't have been married to.

I think that that may have been, one of the most tormenting questions, I lived with, when I was in my teens, and early twenties, thinking that God has only one will, that there is only one right decision, and if I miss it, I have ruined my life.

I guess, Alice, that's the price of godliness, that's the price of thoughtfulness. I went through, I had a crush on one after another, I went with them until we broke up, we couldn't stand each other, finally found somebody that I had a crush on, and she said yes.

I discovered that's how I found Bonnie, you know, she had all that I was ever looking for, in a girl, and I asked her for a date, she said yes. To do Diane justice, though, I sensed in her, there was character, and a love for God.

[14 : 24] And she's a wonderful person. But the reality is, I didn't weigh and struggle, with a lot of those issues at the time. I was in a tradition, and in a school setting, in which that really was a struggle.

They made an issue out of that. They made an issue out of it, and for me, the all-consuming question, for my whole life at that point, was to know God's will, because if I missed it, I had missed everything.

And it was a one-shot thing. Yes, and obviously, a thoughtful person, is going to weigh very carefully, the decision about marriage. It's one of the bigger choices.

Yes, you marry somebody, and biblically, you marry that person for life. That's a long-term decision. That's right. But all of this is to say, I think, that behind the question, how do I know God's will for the person I'm going to marry, there needs to be a definition of terms as to what we mean by God's will.

Because often, when we are all talking with the same language, we think we're talking about the same thing. And that's not necessarily true. That when we talk about how to know God's will, we may not be raising a biblical question, even though the Bible itself does talk about God's will, but maybe talk about it in a different way.

[15 : 47] When I was growing up, we had the bullseye theory of God's will. You know, there's this big target out there, and there's the bullseye in the middle, and that's what you tried to hit. But you may land in the next circle out, or the circle outside of that.

So there were sort of levels of God's will. People would say, you ought to be in the center of God's will. That's right. You had to be in the center of God's will. You need God's perfect will. We have to be careful, because we're not making light of the concepts.

We're saying that they can mislead us if we don't share understanding. And I think, for this reason, Haddon raising the question of definition is extremely important, because if we aren't all talking about the same thing, then we really can't have a conversation.

Well, let's talk about the way the Bible uses God's will and the way we may use it. I mean, one way in which the Bible speaks of God's will is what we could call God's sovereign will.

And that is, God's sovereign will is God's purpose that goes from eternity past to eternity future, whereby God has determined all that shall take place.

[16 : 51] Get a reflection of that, for example, Ephesians 1.11. It says, In Christ we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him, who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

Okay, so all the focus being on God, the initiatives, the action that he takes. And it's the focus on the fact that history is God's story. God writes the storyline.

Theologians sometimes call the sovereign will of God, God's hidden will or his secret will. Because while it is operative, he doesn't necessarily reveal it to men and women.

You get it sometimes, say, the prophets who prophesied the coming of Jesus. He'd be born in Bethlehem. He would die for our sins, according to Isaiah chapter 53.

So you had, you know, glimpses of it. But for the most part, God works out this sovereign will. And we don't know what it is until we look back. And even then, we're not always sure, because we don't see all the parts.

[17 : 59] It feels, Haddon, in listening to what you're saying, that this is sort of a big screen, God's will, the scope of history, and that this isn't focused on my decisions that I have to make today.

Is that true or not true? Yes, it's true in the sense that everything that goes on goes on under God's design.

That's what I think the Bible's talking about when it talks about God's sovereign will. And part of the tough part of that is the interplay between that sovereign will and our ability to make choices, right?

That's what we struggle with. And that's the great question that theologians struggle with. The question of what my will is in God's will. How can I be morally responsible?

If it's all predetermined. If it's all predetermined. And everybody struggles with this. Sure. And Haddon, even though we have a lot of questions about what that sovereign will is, isn't it true that if we, in the process, end up with a fatalistic attitude, that there's no point in me worrying about it because it's going to happen, then we can be sure we have a wrong view, at least as far as the scriptures are concerned.

[19 : 08] Yes, because it's clear that God gives me responsibility, gives me choices to make, and I have to make them. And there's a sense in which I can take great comfort from God's sovereign will, that his history isn't going to get out of control.

On the other hand, I can't take a presumptuous attitude towards that, that whatever will be, will be, because it's clear as I read the Bible that God calls on me in given situations to make decisions.

In some inexpressible way that we can't put together. God can. And that leads us to the second definition. That is, we talked about God's sovereign will, where he works out all of the affairs of history.

But a second way in which we could talk about God's will is God's moral will. And there, we're talking about what God has revealed to us in the scriptures. That is, the Bible tells us what God wants us to believe, how God wants us to respond, how God wants us to behave.

It's the moral will of God. And obviously, as you read the Bible, it is clear in the question we're wrestling with that is very difficult to answer is how does this moral will relate to God's sovereign will?

[20 : 23] But it's clear that God has given us his will, in a sense. He has told us what he wants us to be and do. And when we talk about someone being biblically informed in order to make good decisions, this is really the part of God's will that we're talking about, isn't it?

That we really understand God's moral will as it's revealed to us in the scriptures. And this is, I think, the heart and core of what Christians must know if they are going to make good decisions.

That is, we need to know God's moral will. God has given us what we need to know in all of the decisions of life to be what God wants us to be. So if you say, are you in the will of God, you mean, biblically, are you doing what God has called you to do?

And yet hadn't so often, it seems like, and I think people would say, but what I'm wrestling with doesn't feel like a moral issue. It just seems like an issue of how should I spend my money or how should I choose a relationship.

And your bottom line, all of those are moral issues, aren't they? How I spend my money is, bottom line, a moral issue. I guess that's where it's going to take some effort to uncover what the moral issues are underlying it.

[21 : 34] Which is the third way we talk about God's will, God's individual will for these specific decisions that I have to make. And one of the things we want to talk about in our programs is I have to make these individual choices.

How do I make them and make them well, knowing the Bible and applying the Bible to life's decisions? Christians who want to know about God's individual will for them are going to take God's moral will in the scripture very, very serious.

Several years ago when I was the president at Denver Seminary, I had a conversation with a student. It was in November, and I asked her what she was going to do during the Christmas vacation.

And she said she was thinking about going skiing. I asked her how she was going to make that decision, whether she was going skiing or not. She said that she had put out a fleece. She had prayed that if her father sent her some money, then she would know that that's what God wanted her to do.

If her father didn't send her any money, then she couldn't afford to go, and she would know God wasn't in that. Let me look at that passage back in the book of Judges, because I think all kinds of folks turned to it.

[22 : 53] God had come to Gideon and told Gideon that he was going to be successful. But Gideon isn't too sure of what he has heard from God, evidently, and so he wants something to confer.

He wants a sign. And so in Judges 6.36, Gideon says, All right, Lord, if you'll save Israel by my hand, as you have promised, look, I'll place a wool fleece on the threshing floor.

If there's dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I'll know that you'll save Israel by my hands, as you said. And that's exactly what happened.

The Lord worked. The dew was on the fleece. The ground was dry. I just wonder where he came up with an idea. I mean, why that? Why couldn't the Lord, if you stand over a cloud that looks like a dragon?

Or, I mean, a wild piece of wool on the threshing floor and the dew is... But it doesn't matter, does it? It may be all he had to work with. And it came up heads. I mean, that's exactly what happened.

[23 : 59] And then, you know, he doesn't want to rush. He says, Well, don't be angry with me. Let me make just one more request.

Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time, make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew. And God did that. That night, only the fleece was dry.

All the ground was covered with dew. And so, on the basis of that story, which is basically a story of unbelief. I mean, Gideon had been told by God he's going to beat the Midianites.

But on the basis of that story, people say they put out a fleece. Because God played the game with Gideon, right? I mean, God did it. Yes, He did. God honored. There's a sense in which God honored that request.

But what you have to, I think it's very important to say, when God honored the request, what did God actually do? What God did was to perform two grade A miracles.

[25 : 00] What do you mean grade A? Well, I mean, this wasn't an accident of the weather. Here you had the fleece dry, the ground wet. The next night, it's reversed.

You know, if the ground gets wet, the fleece is going to get wet. If the ground is dry, the fleece is dry. But you got a miracle here. Yeah, this was the genuine thing. Yeah, the genuine thing. And so it isn't just an accident.

In fact, with this young woman in Denver, I said to her, does your dad send you money very often? She said, yes, he does. He doesn't send it, you know, every month.

But, you know, he does send it pretty often. I said, well, look, you talk about, you know, the fleece. I said, what I think you ought to do is to pray that President Reagan, who was in office at the time, that he'd send you the money.

And then if you got the money from President Reagan, you'd say, the next thing, Lord, would be, could you have Mrs. Statcher, who was the prime minister of Great Britain, And you're a bigger cynic than Gideon was.

[26 : 04] You know? You criticize him for his own movie. Look at yours. Well, I mean, even I would have been impressed. You're a dear Christian sister who wants to know what God wants her to do.

How about skiing? Well, the way I looked at it... You fill her mind with doubts. But I think it is important to look at what this story is saying, because you take a story like this, and then you apply it to decision-making.

It's like saying that a donkey spoke to Balaam and going down to the barnyard to see what the donkeys have to say about your decision. I mean, this is not a way of trying to get God's guidance in a decision unless you're willing to submit to two miracles.

Usually what we do is we go with something like a 60-40 possibility. But Gideon's going for miracles in order to have his decision confirmed.

I wish someone had told me that 50 years ago. It could have saved me some grief. I told you what now? What are you hearing from... That I needed grade-A miracles and not a 60-40 kind of thing in some of the decisions that I was making as a teenager and as a college student.

[27 : 18] So if you're going to use this technique, then really go for a miracle. That's right. Go for something contrary to nature. That's right. Okay. Go for a miracle that, in a sense, goes in the direction opposite of what you would like to do.

That is, if you say, I'm going to go skiing, and unless I get a letter from President Reagan that tells me I shouldn't do it, I'm going to go skiing.

You want to go skiing? Do it the other way. At least bend the miracle in the right direction. So you're not saying, then, that it's wrong to put out a fleece. I'm not.

Are you? Do you mean an animal fleece? No, I mean, are you saying that it's wrong to try to determine the will of God by asking for a miracle to confirm it one way or the other?

Oh, if you get a miracle, that's great, but most of the people putting out fleeces aren't putting out requests for miracles. I don't think many people get miracles to confirm their decisions. So in that sense, I don't think it's a very valid way of finding out what God wants you to do.

[28 : 20] Another thing, Haddon, backing up just a little bit to an earlier statement you made in our conversation, you said that this really was a story. The story of Gideon is a story of unbelief.

God had already given him the assurance that he would be victorious over the Midianites, and he is coming back saying, I didn't really believe what you said, Lord. I need some additional proof.

Whereas the way I was taught about decision-making, really wasn't a matter of unbelief as much as it was just trying to get direction in my life.

So it seems to me that even the basic thrust of this does not apply. Yes, Gideon isn't asking to find guidance. God has given him the guidance he needs.

He is looking for some kind of confirmation. But there must have been a question in his mind, Haddon. Well, obviously there was. Is it possible that God gave him a strong impression, and now he's trying to check out the impression?

[29 : 21] Yes. What we don't know in the Old Testament is when God speaks to a man like this and gives him direction, what we don't know is what that means. It's pretty specific.

I mean, he's going up against the Midianites. He knows he's supposed to go. But apparently it was not as clear or definite as you might think this is the voice of God.

He is, after all, human. And I think all of us have been in a position where we don't really know if we believe our eyes or our ears. And we say, did I really hear you say that, or did I really see that? And maybe that's what was happening, too.

And I think, to be fair, there are people who have put out fleeces. They have looked for some kind of sign. And things have happened that, in a way, are almost uncanny.

And I would not deny that God, you know, can't do this. What I would say is that this passage in Judges is not given to us today to tell us how to make decisions about whether we should buy a house or whether we should marry a certain person or whether we should move to Cincinnati or New York to get a new job.

[30 : 30] It would be, I think, a misuse of this passage to take it and make it a principle for decision-making. That's not why it was given. And I think it's a dangerous business to take it and apply it to these decisions we have to make.

And a better route today, then, is what? A better route today is to know the Scriptures. As you think of the different ingredients in a decision, to say, what does the Bible say about these specifics of the decision?

And then, based on the knowledge of the Scripture... And of its principles. And of its principles. Make a principle decision based on the Word of God. That's why the Scriptures were given.

And a wise Christian submits to the Word to get God's guidance in life. When I turn to the Scriptures, I believe that the Bible contains all that we need to be all that God wants us to be.

in every decision in life. That means we have to know the Bible. And people who do not know the Bible are often at a disadvantage when it comes to knowing what God wants them to do.

[31 : 33] Because God has given us His Word in order to guide us. And He guides us in the decisions of life. But it seems to me that there are people who really believe that they are seeking guidance in the Bible itself.

And even that might stray over into the category of divination. I'm thinking, for example, about people who just let the Bible flop open. And whatever they see first, whatever verse pops off the page at them, is specific guidance from God for them.

And it seems to me that that's not much better than reading the astrology column. That's making the Bible into a book of magic. And therefore, instead of reading it and studying it and understanding its concepts, you're treating it like you would a Ouija board.

You're letting your eye fall on the page. The first thing you see that seems to speak to your situation, you take as being from God. But somebody could say, but this is the Word of God.

It is the Word of God, if you mean by it, that it is a revelation given by God that deals with ideas and concepts inspired by the Holy Spirit that we must understand and believe and act on.

[32 : 47] But it's not the Word of God, if you mean it's magic. God has given us His Word. And men and women who know the Scriptures come to life's decisions. And they know God's will because they know God's Word.

Okay. Thank you for your patience. Any comments? Have you ever known anyone I asked this question before and he's not here to defend himself.

Have you ever known anyone who put out the fleece? Have you ever heard of that before?

I have heard that. And I came from a tradition where the bullseye was it, the center of God's will. And so I understand a little bit of what he's saying there.

In that, if the temptation to think, if I miss this, I've missed everything.

[34 : 10] And I probably mentioned this last week. Some years ago, I was in my role at Operation Rebirth.

I was talking with a man whose son was a student who came in one day and said, I married the wrong woman and I'm going to correct it.

I'm going to marry my secretary. Now, back to this point, he ignored the moral will of God.

That wasn't God's will that he divorce his wife and marry his secretary because God made that plain.

But he tried to excuse that. Thank you, dear. He tried to excuse that by using that target. Now, that's not to say that, well, Romans chapter 7 makes it kind of clear, doesn't it?

[35 : 31] I'm going to miss the moral will of God sometimes. Well, not me, but you will. Sometimes we'll miss that.

That's not to belittle that that our desire is to do everything that God wants us to do. But when it comes to decision making as getting back to the well, there are times that God gave them.

In this case, it was Abraham's steward. he honored that question for a sign. Now, did God have Rebecca specifically for Isaac?

Yeah. Yeah. Because this is the formation of Israel. He's going to use what did he told Abraham?

Through Isaac, your descendants will be named. Right? Abraham agreed with Sarah that, well, I'll have a son through Hagar.

[36 : 59] What was his name again? Come on. What was his name? Ishmael. Ishmael.

God said, no, no. He's not the one. Who is the one?

Isaac. Through Isaac, your descendants will be named. Now, Abraham's pretty old now. Abraham doesn't go himself.

He sends his servant. a wife and he says, get a wife for Isaac. The servant wants to get the wife that God has for Isaac.

Now, for the Christian today, back to what they said, how do we make those kinds of decisions?

[38 : 00] Well, for one thing, for one thing, I would not recommend, I would not recommend to a family to send the hired hand 600 miles on foot, so thousands of miles, you know, by auto, and say, go back to my home country, and there I want you to secure a wife for my son, and you're going to convince her to come and never see her family again, right?

Think about, now, I know I'm jumping ahead, we will go through this, but think about, think about Rebecca's decision, too, because this isn't a situation where she's just going to get in the car and drive 45 minutes to see mom again, she's not going back, and she probably knows that, she, and the servant, the servant has a sign from God, this is the woman, now, remember, Abraham has already released him from his oath, if she refuses to come, right?

so, we'll, God willing, we will pick this up next week with what does the servant do after she draws the water, we're going to look at that, okay, have a great week, God bless you.