

73. With God's will or without

April 1, 2012

I've done this many times in my Christian walk. I am not proud of it, nor do I want to do it again, but I know that I will because I am dense and dumb. I just hope and pray that I wouldn't repeat it so often. I am talking about doing things on my own, even doing good things. Why did I do the things without God's will and guidance? Because either I assumed that it is His will, or I simply didn't bother myself to seek His will in prayer. Have you ever done that before? If you are honest with yourself, the answer is a resounding 'YES' to our shame.

Allow me to give you the setting about what we are going to learn this morning. After His resurrection, Jesus showed Himself to Mary Magdalene at the grave site, then to His disciples a couple more times in the room where they were hiding. Then the Lord told them to go to Galilee which was located about 70 miles north of Jerusalem.

Matthew 28:10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go [and] tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

What Jesus gave them was a clear assignment: "Go to Galilee and wait for Me." As usual, God didn't tell them how long they had to wait. Don't you just hate waiting? We love when our prayers come back with "Yeses" from God; though it is disappointing, but we can deal with His "Nos"; but "Wait" is not something we do well with.

So what do we do? We wait for a long time – like about five minutes and we start to do the things without God's will and His blessings. Guess what happens? Oh yes, the thing doesn't go well and starts to fall apart. What is our next step toward God? We get angry with Him.

This morning our Lord Jesus has a timeless lesson for us that worked for His disciples at the shores of Galilee. We can do the things with God's will, or do without and be miserable. Let's open our hearts to Him so that He can fill them up to the brim with His wisdom and anointing.

A. WITHOUT GOD'S WILL

John 21:1-3 After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

You may say, "Hold on, preacher. Where do you see that Peter was gone fishing without God's will? Instead of doing nothing, maybe he wanted to be industrious." I am glad you asked that. Here are a couple of reasons:

1) Jesus had already prophesied what they would do.

John 16:32a Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own,

The Greek word for 'own' is "idios". It means "pertaining to one's self, one's own, belonging to one's self." According to the Greek Lexicon which is a fancy way to say 'Greek Dictionary', 'idios' means "one's property, one's life, one's things." In other words, Peter was going back to his former occupation – being a fisherman.

2) They got into Peter's boat.

In v3, we see an article 'the' before the word 'boat' in English. In Greek, it is 'ha', a particular boat in Galilee. How often do you allow someone to get into your car and drives off to do his errand? You don't, especially when you use that car for your living. That's what we call "grand theft auto." The same goes here. Peter and his buddies just didn't walk into someone else's boat and went fishing. They got into Peter's boat.

In Korean language, there is no definite grammatical rule for articles. That is why you are noticing missing 'the' and 'a' in my English. I know what you are thinking now. You are wondering, "I thought you were Swedish." Oh, what is the difference between a Korean and a Swedish? They all look alike. Don't confuse me with a few minor facts.

For the first time in three years they had to think about their immediate need for food and how to make a living. Before the Lord Jesus took care of them. But they were not so sure how He was going to provide them what they needed since He was resurrected. Does it mean that planning for future and looking for a job as a Christian is wrong? Absolutely not. The Bible clearly tells us otherwise:

1 Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Peter and other disciples decided in their own that the Lord was not going to provide for them anymore, thus they ignored what they were told to do – "wait for Him." In other words, they started their post-Jesus'-resurrection-life in their own without prayer, without seeking the will of God. What was the result of their own effort without God? They worked all night without a single fish. This was not a good thing for any fisherman.

My fishing career lasted a whole two hours. I couldn't take it. I'd prefer to use my Remington 870 shotgun with buckshot. It will be much faster. But a Game and Fish warden would arrest me if I do that, I am sure.

Making a living is not wrong as a fisherman unless that is not what God called Peter to do. According to Matthew 4, the Lord Jesus called His disciples to be fishers of men.

Let me make an example of me: I am called to be a pastor by the Lord. But if I choose to disobey His command and I decide to be the President of the United States. You may say, "Nah, you cannot do that. Because you were not born in the U.S." That is not a problem, I will just make a birth certificate with Photoshop from my computer like somebody. The majority of the American people don't know the difference and don't care anyway. Even if I become the next President of the United States, I would not have God's will, His guidance, and the most of all, His intimate fellowship with me. That is a terrible place to be.

If I may, I will show a progression of a person with self-reliance:

Self-Reliance > Disobedience > Failure > Loss of intimate fellowship with God
That is bad and ugly.

B. WITH GOD'S WILL

John 21:4-6 But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

When you have a bad fishing day, the last thing you want to hear is, "How is the fishing coming along? Did you catch anything?" To make the matter worse, this guy on the shore was calling the grown men as children. I wonder if Peter remembered the morning when Jesus called him into full-time discipleship. It was déjà vu time for Peter. On that occasion, Peter had fished all night long and caught nothing, either.

The disciples had been out fishing all this time and hadn't caught anything. Now Jesus was telling them to move the net to the other side of the boat. Was that really going to matter? It sounded a little illogical. But the technique wasn't important. What was important was Who told them to do what. So they followed the instruction of this annoying Guy and cast the net on the right side of the boat, wouldn't you know, they found a boat load of fish (Yes, a pun intended) all waiting for them to be caught.

Folks, this is what the whole Christian life really boils down to. Our walk with Christ has constant choices – without God's will which comes from without faith in Him or with God's will which only comes from faith in Him. When we are self-reliant or without God's will or without faith in Him, we become disobedient to His commands that are in our Bible. We become prayerless and Bibleless (Yes, I made up that word).

Before we can find restoration, before we can find forgiveness by God, we have to admit our failure. That is really hard for some people. We don't like to admit we have failed. It seems like more people are willing to say, "I'm sick" than "I'm sorry," or "I have sinned." We have become a nation of dysfunctional victims with all kinds of imaginary diseases, excuses, and blames. It seems like no one wants to take responsibility for their actions any more, always blaming someone or something else.

You may remember hearing "Invictus" is a short Victorian poem by the English poet William Ernest Henley:

"I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."

Oh yeah, that is how we wreck our ship without the guidance of the Light of the world in this pitch dark vile world.

Before we can find God's forgiveness, and indeed, His restoration, we must first admit our need. No excuses. No blaming others. Instead, just honest confession as we take responsibility for our own actions. That is where healing and restoration start. Failure often can be the doorway to real success.

We need to come to that point in our lives as well. We need to come and say, "Lord, I am not satisfied with the way my life is going. I am tired of doing it my way. I want to do it Your way." If you will come to God like that, He will extend His forgiveness to you. Then He will take your life and transform it in ways you couldn't imagine.

C. THE INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAVIOR

John 21:7-14 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. 9 Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"--knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. 14 This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

Don't you just love Peter? You have to love this guy. Though he often did stick his foot in his mouth, he loved Jesus without a doubt. Because of that, he just jumped into the cold morning water to get to Jesus. He couldn't wait for the others to turn the boat around fast enough. If I know anything about Jesus, He must have had a smile on his lips because it was so Peter, a big burly guy splashing water and swimming toward Him as fast as his arms and legs could move.

How do we need to be like Peter and run to Him in our prayers and reading His Word, the Bible daily!

Get this, folks, a breakfast with Jesus at the shore! I don't think that anyone can top that. It probably was fish and chips. The disciple became obedient to the Lord, became successful in fishing and now they were having the intimate fellowship with the Lord.

Please notice how Jesus told them to bring the fish they just caught. God can do everything and anything without our help, but He chooses to include us by using us and working through us. This is an excellent example of the combination of Divine will and human effort.

To illustrate this, please all of you raise your right hands high. With your left hands, tickle the person on your left. Just kidding, no, don't do that. Seriously, keep your hands high and wave at me. OK, why did you do that? Was it my will that actually waved your right hands? No, you heard what I said and you waved your hands in response to my request with your own will.

God's command requires our immediate and total obedience. Can God accomplish what He wants to do without our obedience? Yes, thousand times yes. But we are the ones who are missing out on the blessings of serving the Lord if we are disobedient to Him.

This time I'd like to show a progression of a person with complete dependence to God:

Complete dependence to God > Obedience > Success in God > Intimate fellowship with God

Now that is perfect and beautiful, don't you think?

By the way, why 153 fish? This number has been a field day for speculative interpretations of the Bible since the early church. Here are a couple of comments from commentaries:

- 153 is the added numerical value of the Greek words "Peter" and "fish."
- Some, like Cyril of Alexandria, say that 100 stands for the Gentiles, 50 for Israel and 3 for the Trinity.

But here is the real answer. Are you ready? They caught 153 fish, nothing more and nothing less. We must always be careful not to uck into arguing about these so-called "hidden meanings" in the Word of God.

So how do you succeed in the Christian life? A simple obedience in God's Word. I cannot give more fancy theological mumbo jumbo. Just do what the Bible tells us to do, then we will have success in God.

From the Book of Genesis, the first Book of the Bible to the last Book, Revelation, it tells us that blessing comes from obedience.

Genesis 22:18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

Revelation 22:7 Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

You obey His Word, you get blessed; you disobey it, you slam the doors of blessing. It's always been God's pattern.

D. CHOICES

1) Self-Reliance > Disobedience > Failure > Loss of intimate fellowship with God

2) Complete dependence to God > Obedience > Success in God > Intimate fellowship with God