

Have you ever wondered why, in the parlance of insurance companies and many people, such natural catastrophes as tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes and floods are called "acts of God"? Beautiful sunsets, flowers, the gently falling snow, etc are termed the works of ~~nature~~ ^{nature} and the ~~handiwork~~ of God. Apparently, somewhere along the line, God was conceived of as a stern judge and a divine punisher who sends tragedy and salmaity as punishment. Tragedy somehow in the popular mind ^{is} ~~is~~ tied to the will of God.

I remember a while back that an adult sunday school class teacher gave the Alaskan Earthquake as an example of how God punishes people. The teacher never hazard^{ed} a guess as to what the sin of the Alaskans was.

Many of you have read an old but great little book by Leslie Weatherhead called the will of God. He attacks that kind of popular theology by relating a true incident from his life. He says:

When I was in India I was standing on a veranday of an Indian home darkened by bereavement. My Indian friend had lost his little son . . . on a cholera epidemic. At the far end of the veranda his lttle daguhter, the only remaining child, slept in a cot covered with mosquito net. We paced up and down, and i tried in my clumsy way

to comfort and console him. But he said "Well Padre, it is the will of God. That's all there is to it. It is the will of God."

Fortunately I knew him well enough to be able to reply without being misunderstood, and I said something like this: "Supposing someone crept up on the steps tonight, while you slept, and deliberately put a wad of cotton soaked in ~~with~~ cholera germs over your little girl's mough while she slpet. What would you think of that".

"My God" he said "what would I think of that? ¶

Nobody would do such a damnable thing. If he tried and I caught him i would kill him with as little compunction as I would a snake...What do you mean suggesting such a thing?"

But John, I said, isn't that just what you accused God of doing when you said it was his will? Call your little boy's death the result of mass ignorance, call it mass folly, call it mass sin, call

it bad drains . . . but don't call it the will of God"

Surely we cannot identify as the will of God something for which a man would be locked up in jail or put in a criminal asylum.

How often we wnat to blame God when tragedy strikes. Maybe we need to blame somone for personal loss and because tragedy is beyond control and we dare not blame ourselves. We say, in effect, "The universe is his. He could have prevented this, but he did not therefore he is to blame. It must have been his will.

Perhaps that kind of thinking was in the back of the peoples minds when they came to Jesus and told him about a group of Galileans who we attacked and killed as they were offering sacrifices. They wondered if such a tragic act could have been God's will.

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Jesus sensed that they were wondering if God was punishing them for some sin, Jesus replied that if God punished in that fashion for sin no one would escape. Now it is not always easy to discern by looking at an event, what is the will of God and whether the event be good or bad. Not everything that happens can be called the will of God. It is often impossible to determine what is the will of God, or the will of man.

Weatherhead tells about a good friend whose wife had just recently died. His friend said after her death "I just have to accept it, it was the will of God" The man was a doctor. He had been fighting for his wife's life for weeks. He had used all the latest drugs and means at his disposal.

Then Weatherhead asks "If he truly believed her death to be the will of God was he all the time fighting against the will of God. If she had recovered, would he not have called that the will of God"?

The same question might be asked of the healing of Jesus. Was it God's will that the people whom Jesus healed be sick, or was it his will that they be well? If it was his will that they be sick, then Jesus was working against God's will. But we know that the wills of God and Jesus are the same.

Once a man who had been born blind was brought to Jesus. The disciples asked who had sinned, the man or his parents. . or both. They believed as so many do that tragedy is punishment for sin. But Jesus said, in effect, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sin or his parents sin. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him" Then Jesus healed him

Jesus is saying that since he is blind God can use his healing to demonstrate his power.

Perhaps we can learn something about the will of God from the crucifixion of Jesus. Many have taken for granted that the cross was willed by God from the very beginning. but that is not the teaching of the NT. Christ came into the world with the message of God's love for us. Didn't he plead with people to turn from evil and accept him? Isn't he doing that right now?. In everything he did it is apparent that it was god's will that we trust Christ, follow him. It was not his will that Christ be rejected. Jesus said the Kingdom of heaven is at hand and the Kingdom of God is ^{come} ithinyou. He ~~can~~ to

usher in God's reign. He did not come to be rejected and beaten and to be killed. He came to have us follow him and to give us salvation. Yet we would not listen. We turned away from him and despised

him. He said "How often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but you would not"

That's the key. We would not allow ourselves to be gathered under his care, and we cast him off. The cross was really willed by Man, not by God. It was designed and erected by man.

When Jesus spoke about the cross early in his ministry, he spoke about it because he knew that it was inevitable, he knew that the cross could be there despite his will. But God is God. And we cannot defeat him. He took our 'no' and turned it into a resounding 'yes' thru the cross. Just as the blind man's blindness, and the many other illnesses, were used for God's purposes, so was the cross. Because we cannot defeat God, God took the cross, willed by man, and used it to accomplish his will, the salvation of man. That is the irony of the cross. To man it stands as a symbol of rejection and hatred but it was a victory for God because thru it he poured out his love for all mankind.

Thru the cross and thru the healing ministry of Jesus we see that God can and does use tragedies and even our sin that are not his will to bring his will to pass in our lives. He is God, and his power cannot be destroyed by man's will or by the tragic cir-

circumstances of life.

Now, the purpose of Christ, and in him we see the will of God, is to heal the rift between man and God and to bring all creation back into his protective care. We can't drive God from his throne. He remains God and his will will finally be done on earth. William Temple said: "While we deliberate, he reigns; when we decide wisely, he reigns when we decide foolishly, he reigns; when we serve him in humble loyalty, he reigns; when we rebel and seek to withhold our service, he reigns - the Alpha and the Omega, which is and which was ~~to/come~~ and which is to come, the Almighty"

And Paul said, "His love is shown for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" His will is that we receive his love and feel his care for us. That is so even in the moment when tragedy strikes - tragedy that is not caused by God, but which God knows that, thro our acceptance of his love we can overcome. And God says to us as he said to Paul "My grace is all that you need" And because Paul believed that was true, he could write, "I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love; neither death nor life; neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers; neither

the world above nor the world below - there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours thru Christ Jesus our Lord." No greater statement expresses the will of God for our lives than that.