

Mark 14:1-42 • Preparing for God's Will

Introduction

To what extent are people, places, and events voluntarily fulfilling the will of God versus being “forced” to fulfill His will? Entire theologies, movements, and denominations have come into being around the tension between where the free will of man ends and the will of God picks up. In this record of the Christ’s next to the last day before crucifixion, we have a number of examples of this issue across the entire spectrum of possibilities. We have the contrast of what was predicted in advance in God’s Word versus personal choice in the moment. From these examples we may be able to divine what we personally need to do in preparation for the fulfillment of God’s will in our own life and actions.

¹Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; ²for they were saying, “Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people.”

[Read v.1-2] The Authorities Prepare Their Own Plan

Q: What was the will of the chief priests and scribes?

A: Not only to kill Jesus, but to do it according to their own timing so as to preserve appearances before the people.

Q: Would you classify this as God’s will or personal choice?

A: It was their personal choice to kill Christ; it was God’s will to redirect their evil intent so as to be used for the greater glory and fulfillment of God’s will in spite of their personal choice.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

— Romans 8:28

Point: All the “things” which may be undertaken by man for evil, God turns around and “cause...to work together for good”, but not automatically for everyone as such occur according to two criteria: “those who love God” and “those who are called according to His purpose”. The scribes and Pharisees decided to kill Jesus according to **their** own will; God caused it to conform to **His** will for His beloved Son sent for this very purpose.

Application: Man makes plans according to his own will; where appropriate God causes them to be conformed to His will.

³While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. ⁴But some were indignantly remarking to one another, “Why has this perfume been wasted? ⁵For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they were scolding her.

⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. ⁹Truly I say to you, wherever

[Read v.3-9] God’s Preparation for His Own Plan

Q: Why would the urge to help the poor be especially on everyone’s mind at this particular time?

A: Common Jewish tradition called for special gifts and assistance to the poor and needy at Passover.

Point: While addressing the needs of the less fortunate is never an evil thing in and of itself, we must keep in mind that doing deeds in the spirit of obtaining spiritual standing through good works can be. To understand what is going on here we need to consider the contrast between doing good works for selfish reasons versus unselfish, of the greater spiritual issue of works vs. grace.

Q: We know from the parallel Gospel accounts that Judas was the instigator against Mary in this situation. How are they contrasted?

1. Mary gave her best in faith and love; Judas gave his worst in unbelief and self-interest.
2. Mary participated in the preparation of Christ for the fulfillment of God’s will; Judas participated in the preparation of the authorities to treat Christ according to their own will.

the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”

3. Mary fulfilled Christ’s prediction that she would be lovingly memorialized for her actions; Judas fulfilled Christ’s prediction that he would suffer the consequences for his actions and has been subsequently memorialized but in terms of infamy and disdain instead of love and affection.

Point: Both made personal choices regarding their actions and as a result each found themselves to be fulfilling God’s will – Mary on the right end of things, Judas obviously on the wrong end.

Application: Where Christ is concerned every heart will make a choice to either support and follow Him in love and obedience or to work against Him according to rebellious self-interest.

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. ¹¹They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.

[Read v.10-11] Man’s Preparations

Q: Who first devised the plan to kill Jesus? Was it Judas?

A: We know from the Gospel accounts that almost from the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry the religious authorities of the day discussed how to end His ministry by ending His life.

Q: How did they come around to this plan? Were they “born” to carry this out no matter what?

A: The Gospel accounts tell us in each instance that the repeated cause was their rejection of Christ. They not only made a personal choice in rejecting His signs, message, and overall ministry, but made the choice to take their rejection to the furthest extreme possible as expressed in their desire to kill Him. What they desired physically reflected their true spiritual condition.

Q: What is the ultimate confirmation provided here which reveals that self-interest is the central issue?

A: “They...promised to give him money”. (v.11) Judas did not get all he desired in his partial unfaithfulness by stealing from the group’s purse (Jn. 13:29), nor the feigned interest in the sale of the perfume for the poor, but ultimately in complete betrayal of Christ.

Point: Judas’ actions reflected his spiritual condition. He progressively chose himself over Christ and ultimately sold himself out to the world rather than being sold out to Christ.

Q: What was their coordinated plan?

A: To “betray Him at an opportune time”. (v.12) They were going to do it their own way in their own time.

Application: Where Christ is concerned every heart will be a sell-out to the world or sold out exclusively for Him, but it stems from the free will choice of each individual heart.

¹²On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

¹³And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, “Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; ¹⁴and wherever he enters, say

[Read v.12-16] The Messiah’s Preparations

Q: What might be the biggest contrast between the dinner that took place in Bethany and the dinner Jesus is preparing for here?

A: Whereas Jesus was previously the guest, here He is the host.

Point: In the context of God’s will this may be significant to note since we will now see Christ and others working from both sides of things and in different roles.

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to the owner of the house, “The Teacher says, “Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?””¹⁵ And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there.”

¹⁶The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

Q: How might the prearrangements made by Christ be compared to those of the authorities which opened this chapter?

A: The authorities, according to their own free will and personal choice, decided to kill Jesus according to their own plan and timing; Christ, according to God’s divine plan, decided in advance He would submit to God’s will according to God’s own plan and timing. Everyone on both sides was making a personal choice, but it was God who ultimately used all things to fulfill His will.

Q: How is free will versus God’s will exemplified in the owner of the upper room?

A: He was called in advance to do something which he would have to choose to do when God’s plan and timing called for it to be carried out. He knew in advance what Christ wanted but had to choose to participate when the time came to actually carry it out. (*Hint: This is probably going to apply to Judas as well.*)

Point: *From a certain perspective we might say that the authorities and Judas plotted one thing and the Father and the Son used them for God’s divine purposes. But just as the authorities and Judas chose to work against God, Christ the Son chose to work in concert with His Father.*

Q: How does what Christ is planning here compare with what happened in Bethany?

A: Whereas Mary was preparing Christ’s body for what was to come, Christ is now preparing His spiritual body – the Church to come through His disciples – for the very same thing. They had their “dinner plans”, so to speak, now Christ has His.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

— Ephesians 2:10

Application: *Where Christ is concerned we must follow through in our personal choice and actions to live in concert with His will for our individual life in accordance with His greater purposes.*

¹⁷When it was evening He came with the twelve. ¹⁸As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me— one who is eating with Me.”

¹⁹They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, “Surely not I?”

²⁰And He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. ²¹For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”

[Read v.17-21] Preparing Those in Rejection of Christ

Q: Why might some who read these verses come away with the notion that Judas had no choice but to do what he was born (or “predestined”) to do?

A: They connect the fact that Christ’s betrayal was going to take place “as it is written of Him” (v.21) with the fact that Judas is here identified as the one who is going to fulfill those written predictions.

Q: Why are each of these facts correct individually but false in their application to Judas collectively?

A: Just because God knows the outcome does not mean He makes someone participate regardless of their own personal will. In other words, God simply knew in advance what Judas would **CHOOSE** to do.

Q: How might the sequence of events in Mark 14 support this conclusion?

A: It begins with the will of the authorities to kill Christ for their own purposes and according to their own timing who are then supported in their efforts by Judas who works against Christ for their own purpose and timing. It is God’s will which redirects their efforts to instead accomplish His purpose instead of theirs.

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Point: Judas was neither a martyr nor a robot, but a responsible human being who made his own decisions which fulfilled the Word of God. He is neither a hero (“After all, **SOMEONE** had to betray Jesus”) nor a helpless victim of predestination with no hope of salvation. Judas was lost for the same reason every person has been lost in history up to this very hour: he did not repent of his sins and believe on Jesus Christ; instead, he rejected Him. Anyone who has not been born again will one day wish they were never born at all!

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.
— Isaiah 55:11

Application: We can choose to be either willing or unwilling participants where God’s Word and will is concerned, but that has no bearing on the fact that it will be fulfilled regardless. Just because God knows the outcome in advance does not mean He has created anyone who has no choice in the matter.

²²While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is My body.”

²³And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴And He said to them, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

²⁷And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, because it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.’ ²⁸But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

²⁹But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away, yet I will not.”

³⁰And Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times.”

³¹But Peter kept saying insistently, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”

And they all were saying the same thing also.

[Read v.22-26] Preparing Those in Acceptance of Christ

Q: Within the context of the discussion to this point, what might be particularly ironic about what we now refer to as “Communion” or “the Lord’s Supper”?

A: It literally served to prepare believers for what was to come in the work of the cross, but simultaneously became an ongoing symbol of preparation for believers for the final work of Christ’s Second Coming. Whereas it was intended for those literally present to remind them that what was about to happen was taking place according to God’s will and timing, it subsequently serves to remind all believers of what is yet to come in accordance with God’s will and timing.

Application: Christ provided the Church with a reminder that by personal choice and the application of faith does each believer participate in God’s salvific plan through Christ both in the work of the cross already accomplished for this life, and in His kingdom to come in the next life.

[Read v.27-31] Knowing What Will Happen vs. What Is Intended

Q: So were the disciples “forced” to fall away to fulfill Christ’s prediction? Was Peter “forced” to deny Christ for the same reason?

A: Knowing what they would **CHOOSE** to do, Christ discloses the outcome in advance.

Q: Why don’t they suffer the same, ultimate predicted fate as Judas?

A: Because they don’t magnify their choice by acting on it in defiance of Christ; in their case each will instead repent and be restored.

Point: Christ knew in advance that Judas’ choice would lead to eternal destruction and that the others’ choice would only lead to temporary separation but ultimate restoration. God did not cause Judas to be born for the purpose of going to hell (as some contend) nor the others for the purpose of going to heaven. He did, however, know in advance the inevitable end result **of their respective choices**.

Application: We do not have to be perfect in order for God to accomplish His will through us; we can recover from temporary failures in our obedience because there is always restoration through repentance of sin followed up with obedience to His Word.

³²They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here until I have prayed.”

³³And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. ³⁴And He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.”

³⁵And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. ³⁶And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”

³⁷And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? ³⁸Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

³⁹Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. ⁴¹And He came the third time, and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!”

[Read v.32-42] In the Midst of Knowing God’s Will

Q: Remaining in the context of the discussion to this point, how does Christ provide a personal example of human choice versus God’s will?

A: He was obviously called for the purpose of fulfilling God’s will in the work of the cross and beyond – something many might label as “predestined” to accomplish, but He obviously had to choose according to His own human free will to submit and do it.

Q: What might be the ultimate irony hinted at in the contrast of Jesus at Gethsemane and Judas at Gethsemane?

A: Each respectively fulfilled the advanced written Word of God not as robots forced to carry out God’s instructions regardless of their feelings, but in accordance with their personal choice whether or not to serve Him, one to God’s glory, the other to his eternal destruction.

Application: *It is by Christ’s own personal example that we understand that although God’s will has a plan for our life, it is our own choice as to whether it will be voluntarily accomplished through us.*

Overall Application

There are those who insist that this is a case of “either/or” – either God creates people in advance to carry out His will no matter what their personal convictions or everyone has free will to do whatever they want in spite of God’s intentions. Biblically the tension between free will and God’s foreordained plans are to be kept in equal balance with each other, neither actually contradicting the other. We are called, but can choose whether or not to heed and comply with that call. If we choose our own way, it will not deter God from His original goals and He will actually use those ill intentions to accomplish them anyway. Our choice does not change the will of God but facilitates whether we are a willing or unwilling participant with the added startling consequence of deciding where we end up for all eternity where God’s ultimate will is concerned.