

The Glory of God's Will

High in the mountains of North Wales in a place called Llanymawddwy, a shepherd named John Jones lives with his wife, Mari, and his black-and-white dog, Mack. I stood one misty summer morning in the window of their farmhouse watching John on horse-back herding sheep with Mack. A few cows were quietly chewing their cud in a nearby corner, while perhaps a hundred sheep moved across the dewy meadow toward the pens where they were to be dipped.

Mack, a champion Scottish Collie, was in his glory. He came of a long line of working dogs, and he had sheep in his blood. This was what he was made for; this was what he had been trained to do. It was a marvelous thing to see him circling to the right, circling to the left, barking, crouching, racing along, herding a stray sheep here, nipping at a stubborn one there, his eyes always glued to the sheep, his ears listening for the tiny metal whistle from his master that I couldn't hear.

Mari took me to the pens to watch what John had to do there. When all the animals had been shut inside the gates, Mack tore around the outside of the pens and took up his position at the dipping trough, frantic with expectation, waiting for the chance to leap into action again.

One by one, John seized the rams by their curled horns and flung them into the antiseptic. They would struggle to climb out the side, and Mack would snarl and snap at their faces to force them back in. Just as they were about to climb up the ramp at the far end, John caught them by the horns with a wooden implement, spun them around, forced them under again, and held them—ears, eyes and nose submerged for a few seconds.

I've had some experiences in my life that have made me feel very sympathetic to those poor rams—I couldn't figure out any reason for the treatment I was getting from the Shepherd I trusted. And He didn't give me a hint of explanation. As I watched the struggling sheep, I thought, "If there were some way to explain! But such knowledge is too wonderful for them—it is high, they cannot attain unto it." So far as they could see, there was no point whatsoever.

When the rams had been dipped, John rode out again on his horse to herd the ewes, which were in a different pasture. Again I watched with Mari as John and Mack went to work again, the one in charge, the other, obedient. Sometimes, tearing at top speed around

the flock, Mack would jam on four-wheeled brakes, his eyes blazing but still on the sheep, his body tense and quivering, but obedient to the command to stop. What the shepherd saw, the dog could not see—the weak ewe that lagged behind, the one caught in a bush, the danger that lay ahead for the flock.

"Do the sheep have any idea what's happening?" I asked Mari.

"Not a clue!" she said.

"And how about Mack?"

I can't forget Mari's answer: "The dog doesn't understand the pattern—only obedience."

There are those who would call it nothing more than a conditioned reflex, or, at best, blind obedience. I saw two creatures who were in the fullest sense "in their glory." A man who had given his life to sheep, who loved them and loved his dog. And a dog whose trust in that man was absolute, whose obedience was instant and unconditional, and whose very meat and drink was to do the will of his master. "I delight to do thy will," was what Mack said, "Yea, thy law is within my heart."

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What is this thing called “trust?” Did Mack’s response to John’s commands hinge on the dog’s approval of the route his master was taking? Mack didn’t know what the shepherd was up to, but *he knew the shepherd*.

Have you and I got a Master we can trust? Do we ask first of all to be allowed to examine and approve the scheme?

The Apostle Paul admitted the limitations of his own understanding, but he was absolutely sure of his Master. He never said, “I know why this is happening.” He said, “I know whom I have believed.”

We start, then, with the recognition of who God is. He is our Creator, the One whose spoken Word called into Being the unimaginable thing called space and the equally unimaginable thing called time. He set the stars in their trajectories and put the sliding shutter on the lizard’s eye.

This is the God who dreamed you up, thought of you before light existed, created you, formed you, and now calls you by name. He says to us, “Fear not.” He says, “I have redeemed you.”

It is this same One who asks you and me to do what He wants us to do. The God of Creation who’s got the whole wide world in His hands. The God who—in the Person of Jesus Christ—“for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was made man and crucified.” Those hands that keep a million worlds from spinning into oblivion were nailed motionless to a cross. For us. That Hand that held the stars—laid on you. Can you trust Him?

Two thousand years ago, Paul said that the

Jews were looking for miracles. The Greeks were seeking after wisdom. Not much has changed, has it? People are still looking for instant solutions, chasing after astrologers and gurus and therapists and counselors, but Christianity still has only one story to tell—it’s an old, old story: Jesus died for you. Trust Him.

And if you can trust that kind of God, what do you do next? You do what He tells you. You obey. If you know your Master, you will to do His will.

This world is His show; He’s running it. Do we think of it as under our management? Created for the service of our own desires? “Do your own thing,” they tell us. They even say, “If it feels good, do it.” Have you ever heard a more idiotic piece of advice? Is it our world, a sort of make-your-own-sundae proposition, with the will of God just a nice creamy squirt of earthly success and heavenly approval that goes on top? The will of God is not something you add to your life. It’s a course you choose. You either line yourself up with the Son of God and say to the Father, “Thy will be done,” or you capitulate to the principle that governs the rest of the world and say “My will be done.”

We identify ourselves with Christ or we deny Him. Jesus chose a path, and went down it like a thunderbolt. When we say as Christ did, “I have set my face like flint to do His will,” we are baptized into his death—and like the seed that falls into the ground and dies, we rise to new life.

Obedience to God is action. It’s an act of the will. God gave us this precious gift of freedom of the will so that we would have something to give back to Him. *Put* yourself in His hands. *Choose*. *Give* yourself. *Present* your body as a living sacrifice. Until you offer up your will, you do not know Jesus as Lord.

Let me go on to the third lesson. The shepherd and his dog reminded me that the glory of God’s will for us means *joy*. It can’t mean anything less from the kind of God we’ve been talking about. He

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made us for glory and for joy. Does He ask us to offer up our wills to Him so that He can destroy them? Does He take the desire of our hearts and grind it to a powder?

Be careful of your answer. Sometimes it seems that He does just that. The rams were flung helplessly into the sheep dip by the shepherd they had trusted. God led the people of Israel to a place called Marah, where the water was bitter. Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. The disciples were led into a storm. John the Baptist, the faithful servant, had his head chopped off at the whim of a silly dancing girl and her evil scheming mother.

Nearly 21 years ago, five American missionaries attempted to take the Gospel to a group of jungle Indians who had never heard of Christ. On the eve of their departure they all sang that great hymn by Edith Cherry:

"We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender,

We go not forth along against the foe.

Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy Keeping tender,

We rest on Thee and in Thy name we go."

One of the men was Jim Elliott, my husband, who had written in his diary when he was a junior in college: "Father, take my life, yea, my blood if thou wilt, consume it with Thine enveloping fire. It is not mine to save, have it Lord, pour it out for an oblation to the world."

Could Jim have imagined how literally that prayer would be answered? Months of preparation went into the effort to reach the Auca Indians of Ecuador. The men prayed, planned, worked, dropped gifts from an airplane and believed at last that God was clearly showing them that it was time to go. They went, and they were all speared to death.

Five men who had put their trust in a God who represents Himself as our Shield and our Defender were speared. *They were speared to death in the course of their obedience.*

Now what does that do to your faith? Does it

demolish it? A faith that disintegrates is a faith that has not rested in God Himself. You've been believing in something less than ultimate, some neat program of how things are supposed to work, some happiness-all-the-time variety of religion. You have not recognized God as sovereign in the world and in your own life. You've forgotten that we're told to give up all rights to ourselves, lose our lives for His sake, present our bodies as a living sacrifice. The world is sacrifice. In one of Jim's letters to me before we were married, he reminded me that if we were the sheep of His pasture, we were headed for the altar.

But that isn't the end of the story! The will of God is love. And the love of God is not a sentiment in the divine mind; it's a purpose for every individual life. We follow the One who said, "My yoke is easy," yet His own pathway led straight to the Cross. If we follow Him, sooner or later we must encounter that Cross. So how can we say that the will of God leads to joy? We can't possibly say it unless we look beyond the Cross. "For the joy that was set before Him, Jesus endured the Cross."

"Everything that happens," says Romans 8:28, "fits into a pattern for good." There is an overall pattern.

In 1975, my daughter and I had tea with Corrie ten Boom. As she talked about her own experience and that of my husband Jim, she took out a piece of embroidery which she held up with the back to us—just a jumble of threads that made no sense at all. She then repeated for us this poem:

My life is but a weaving betwixt my God and me

I do not choose the colors, He worketh steadily.

Oftimes he weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride

Forget He sees the upper and I the underside.

She then turned the piece over, and we saw that it was a gold crown on a purple background.

The dog didn't understand the pattern—only obedience. As George MacDonald put it, "Obedience is but the other side of the Creative will." The will of God also means joy, because it is redemptive and it transforms. It is redemptive, for it means joy not only for me as an individual, but for the rest of the world as well. Did it ever occur to you that by being obedi-

ent to God you are participating with Christ in His death, and then in His redemptive work?

Your response helps all the rest of us. Obey God for His sake, first of all. Obey Him for your own sake—if you lose your life, remember He promised you'd find it. But obey Him too, for my sake—for the sake of all of us.

There is a spiritual principle here, the same one that went into operation when Jesus went to the Cross. The offering up of ourselves, our bodies, our wills, our plans, our deepest heart's desire to God is the laying down of our lives for the life of the world. This is the mystery of sacrifice. There is no calculating where it will end.

This is what I mean by transformation. God wills to transform loss into gain, all shadow into radiance. I know He wants to give you beauty for ashes. He's given me the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Jim Elliott and his four companions believed that the world passes away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Another translation says they are "part of the permanent and cannot die." In Jim's own words, by giving up what he couldn't keep, he gained what he couldn't lose. Because of Corrie ten Boom's obedience and that of her family, through the hideousness of a concentration camp, because they looked not at what's visible but at what's invisible, hundreds of thousands have seen the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God. Jesus had to go down into death, the seed had to be buried and abide alone in order to bring forth life.

The glory of God's will means trust, it means the will to do His will and it means joy. Can you lose? Certainly you can. Go ahead and lose your life—that's how you find it! "My life," Jesus said, "for the life of the world."

What's *your* life for?

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